

The Gift and the Labor of Gratitude:
Reflections on Generativity in
Adult Development

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ABSTRACT

The Gift and the Labor of Gratitude: Reflections on Generativity in Adult Development

Daniel A. Schouela

This thesis proposes that, following their assumption of those roles and responsibilities they believe will constitute them as independent adults, individuals during adulthood optimally find themselves summoned to recognize their relative lack of self-sufficiency. More specifically, the view articulated here suggests that the psychic work at the heart of adulthood concerns the progressive acknowledgment of temporality and interdependence as fundamental dimensions of human life.

The perspective formulated in this study attempts to amplify Erik Erikson's contributions concerning the centrality of intergenerational relations in adult development and his psychodynamic emphasis on the experience and resolution of conflict in personal transformation. In this regard, Erikson's conception of the vital virtue of adulthood—generativity—is considered in relation to the ideas of gift and gratitude and it is posited that the generative capacity to give is dialectically related to the capacity to feel grateful for the gifts one has received.

The capacity to gratefully acknowledge that one is and has been the recipient of benefits bestowed by others is taken to be a complex developmental achievement. It requires the recognition that one is situated temporally in a web of interpersonal relations and the simultaneous renunciation of the pursuit of self-sufficiency and invulnerability. In this connection, gratitude, and in turn the capacity to give, are viewed as the fruit of an ongoing labor by way of which persons sustain an awareness of their indebtedness, overcome their sense of inequality in reference to their benefactors, and come to experience themselves as having something of value to transmit to others.

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&
DEDICATION**

One person has labored along with me over the years as I have lost and found, again and again, my confidence and, so, my voice. Sonia Serfaty has been steadfast in her support and encouragement and love. To her, I shall always, happily, be indebted.

This thesis is for Jessica and Noah, who bless our lives.

A Gift

Just when you seem to yourself
nothing but a flimsy web
of questions, you are given
the questions of others to hold
in the emptiness of your hands,
songbird eggs that can still hatch
if you keep them warm,
butterflies opening and closing themselves
in your cupped palms, trusting you not to injure
their scintillant fur, their dust.
You are given the questions of others
as if they were answers
to all you ask. Yes, perhaps
this gift is your answer.

Denise Levertov (1996), *Sands of the Well*

“Gratitude is the most pleasant of virtues, though not the easiest...That gratitude is a virtue, however, should suffice to indicate that it cannot be taken for granted, that it is something we can be lacking in, and that consequently, in spite of or perhaps because of the pleasure, there is merit in experiencing it. But why? Gratitude is a mystery, not because of the pleasure it affords us but because of the obstacles we must overcome to feel it. It is the most pleasant of virtues and the most virtuous of pleasures.”

André Comte-Sponville (2002), *A Small Treatise on the Great Virtues*

“Insofar as generosity does not understand itself to be deeply rooted in a receptive encounter with others, it will proliferate a blindness, theft, and imperialism despite its best efforts; it will ensure an oblivion that continually suppresses the question concerning how intelligent giving might happen, given the myriad specificities of the moment that calls for the gift. The most difficult and often the highest aspect of giving is receiving the other in agonistic dialogical engagements.”

Romand Coles (1997), *Rethinking Generosity*

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1 Introduction

“Humans do not need to know simply because some putative eternal essence or genetic coding endow them with a theoretical curiosity...The *theoros* whom Husserl invokes when he speaks of a drive to *theoria*—not ‘theory’—is not a ‘theoretician’ but a participant in a religious drama, seeking order in his/her life, seeking to orient him/herself to self, to others and to the cosmos at large. The *theoros* does not ask, dispassionately, ‘what is true?’ He/she is asking, *how shall I live?*...[P]hilosophy is always a practical endeavor in the sense of raising the question of the Idea of the Good. So are all the human disciplines. Psychology does not start from a dispassionate desire to know but from the desire to heal and so is *ab initio* a morally committed, not a neutral, discipline.” (Kohak, 1993)

It is a curious fact that relatively little attention has been given in (Western) philosophy and, especially, in psychology to the nature and significance of the experience of gratitude (for some very recent psychological work see Emmons and McCullough, 2004). It seems plausible to suppose that this may be linked, and partly due, to the historical prevalence, in both disciplines, of a conception of the self which emphasizes and valorizes the independence of the individual and which implicitly posits autonomy as somehow primordially given. Insofar as gratitude is an experience which grows out of and acknowledges the value of (certain kinds of) interpersonal relationships, it is understandable that this mode of emotional responsiveness to occasions when others benefit and enrich the self would tend to be overlooked by individualistic frameworks which have been inclined to construe self-sufficiency as the telos of human development and detached impartiality as the essence of our human ethical orientation.

From another point of view, some might call into question any account of human relationships which includes the notions that persons do indeed at times genuinely seek to contribute to the well-being of others and that gratitude is the response by which such contributions are freely acknowledged by those who have benefited from them. According to certain (skeptical) perspectives, gratitude would need to be regarded with suspicion, as a compliant reaction on the part of a subject occupying a subordinate position in a field of interpersonal relationships invariably and inescapably structured by motives related to power and domination.

In the present thesis, I have proceeded on the basis of a view which affirms that there is a meaningful distinction to be drawn between genuinely grateful responses and compliant reactions and that the former represent a critically important feature of moral experience. The approach I will take will consider certain aspects of the nature and significance of gratitude by situating it within the context of a view of the self which has been explored in various disciplines over the last several years and which aims to address, or redress, problematic features of earlier, individualistic accounts. This more recent perspective is one which emphasizes the relational nature of selfhood. More specifically, this viewpoint or paradigm: (1) characterizes the self as emerging within and constituted significantly by the matrix of the person's relations with others, (2) envisions autonomy and independence as growing out of and as sustained by particular facilitating interpersonal conditions, and (3) construes optimal experience as having an interactional or dialogical structure. In a sense,

this relational perspective puts forward the idea that interdependence is at the heart of human existence, with respect to both the conditions or circumstances under which the self takes shape and those by way of which persons come to feel that their lives have meaning and value. In this framework, the notion of dependence may be seen as taking on a new significance. Whereas dependence is viewed in individualistic accounts as an unfortunate state which persons, as soon as possible, ought to transcend and in accounts stressing the inevitability of power and domination as inextricably linked to subservience, in relational accounts dependence is, on the one hand—retrospectively—the original and unavoidable source and context of the self and, on the other—prospectively—a mode of experiencing which constitutes a fundamental condition of enjoyment and the flourishing of human lives. In this latter regard, the positive dimension of dependence, lost in formulations which stressed the need to establish independence or the impossibility of giving without subordinating, is recovered: we are now able to explore how persons come to avow and attach significance to their capacity to depend on the trustworthiness of others (and of the self) and how interdependence and reciprocity constitute the soil out of which enjoyable, meaningful and valuable experiences grow.

2 The Acknowledgment of Temporality and Dependence in Adulthood

“[T]he story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships. The possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide...What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition.” (MacIntyre, 1981)

“Modern moral philosophy has understandably and rightly placed great emphasis upon individual autonomy, upon the capacity for making independent choices. I shall argue that the virtues of independent rational agency need for their adequate exercise to be accompanied by what I shall call the virtues of acknowledged dependence.” (MacIntyre, 1999)

In a recent series of articles, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (1998, 2000, 2001) has proposed a new conception of development from adolescence to adulthood in which he suggests that there exists a distinct period between these two life stages, spanning from the late teens through the twenties. He has designated this period as “emerging adulthood” and has argued that this period is demographically and subjectively distinct from both adolescence and adulthood and is characterized by identity exploration and experimentation in the areas of love, work and worldviews. According to Arnett, emerging adults see themselves as having left adolescence behind but as not having completely entered young adulthood. They have a greater measure of freedom and autonomy than they had as adolescents and are especially concerned about cultivating “individualistic qualities of

character” that will permit them to develop the “self-sufficiency” they consider to be a necessary condition for successful transition to adulthood.

Arnett claims that, while adolescence as a life stage is virtually universal, emerging adulthood “is not a universal period but a period that exists only in cultures that postpone the entry into adult roles and responsibilities until well past the late teens” (2000, 478). That is to say, emerging adulthood is a phenomenon that will most likely be found in industrialized or post-industrial countries and, specifically, in those sectors of society in these countries where various factors—cultural, economic, educational opportunity—make possible a delay of the commitment to and settling into the “enduring and limiting” roles and responsibilities of adult life.

Keeping in mind Arnett’s distinction between emerging adulthood and adulthood proper, I wish now to turn to the principal concern of this thesis: *development in adulthood*. As we have seen, the transition to adulthood is understood by those in their late teens and twenties as entailing the entry of independent, self-reliant persons into long-term roles and responsibilities. In this regard, adulthood itself, as a relatively extended period of the life course, is viewed, at least in part, as structured and as proceeding in relation to these enduring commitments and engagements. Now, in what sense may we speak about *development* in adulthood, acknowledging that the concept of development implies a progressive movement toward an end deemed to be of some value and not simply any pattern of change over time (Cirillo and Wapner, 1986; Freeman and Robinson, 1990; Kaplan, 1983)? Certainly, one approach might be to examine

the relative objective or external success of individuals as they attempt to pursue the various adult roles and responsibilities they have chosen for themselves. In contrast, however, the perspective to be explored here will address the subjective, existential challenge that adulthood represents and will regard development in adulthood in reference to an ideal of psychological, ethical or spiritual maturity and of an authentic sense of self-worth and of the worth of others. The emphasis will be upon the efforts of adult individuals to find and sustain a sense of happiness and to experience their lives as meaningful and valuable. Moreover, our concern throughout will be to explicate certain aspects of the process by way of which these efforts aiming at the good life are, at least to some extent, realized.

As we have noted, in Jeffrey Jensen Arnett's view, the years ranging from the late teens through the twenties are ones in which individuals pursue and attempt to establish a sense of self-sufficiency and individualism which, they believe, will make possible a well-timed, voluntary transition to adulthood. The view to be offered below will suggest that, following their entry into the future- and other-oriented roles and responsibilities they have chosen to embrace as adults, individuals may (and, often, do) begin to travel in a direction that, in a sense, is opposite to the trajectory that typified their emerging adulthood: specifically, they may (and, often, do) find themselves summoned to recognize their relative *lack* of self-sufficiency and individualism. The view to be articulated here will explore and attempt to support the claim that the existential challenge and developmental work that are at the heart of adulthood relate to the progressive *acknowledgment of temporality and interdependence* as essential and intertwined

dimensions of human life. It will be posited that the confrontation in adulthood with the linked realities of time and of interpersonal dependence provokes a reexamination of the scope of human freedom and of the power of human beings to autonomously create and sustain their selfhood and the conditions of their well-being. Moreover, this confrontation also provokes a deepening awareness of the multiple ways in which others have impacted the shape of the self and of the ways in which the self impacts and has the potential of enriching or impoverishing the lives of others.

Now, having linked the idea of adulthood with that of temporality, it is important to establish that this should not be taken as suggesting that children, adolescents or emerging adults lack a sense or an appreciation of time. It is evident that, during their pre-adult years, human beings do come to orient themselves in time, to develop an understanding of the relation between past, present and future and to progressively articulate and grasp conceptions related to causality and probability. The claim that is being explored here concerns the ways in which adult human beings may, under optimal conditions, come to existentially situate themselves in time in a deep and relatively lasting experiential sense and how this process entails profound shifts in the ways in which they come to see and feel about themselves and their relations to others and to the world at large.

The acknowledgment of temporality as an essential dimension of human life has many aspects. On the most fundamental level, it entails the capacity and the readiness to construe one's life as a cohesive whole stretching from birth to death, together with the formulation and integration of the insight that each one of

us has this one and only finite life course to live. In addition to the avowal of these basic existential realities, the acknowledgment of temporality entails the acceptance of the fact that we are situated in time as a causal chain or series, whereby the present moment that we live and experience is understood as an effect of or a response to a complex pattern of antecedent causes or influences. Furthermore, the idea of our temporality involves the appropriation of the fact that we are historical beings, in the sense that we are, each of us, individuals with particular life histories shaped by the intersection of internal and external factors and events. Lastly, the affirmation of our temporality implies the recognition that we are situated intergenerationally: we stand poised between generations which have come before us and those which will come after us and we understand that we are linked to these generations in ways that significantly contribute (and contribute significance) to our lived experience and our sense of the worth of our lives.

Intimately connected with this process of the acknowledgment of temporality is the way in which adults may, as the commitment to their chosen roles and responsibilities deepens, come to understand and appropriate the essentially social or interpersonal dimension of their lives. The affirmation of the fact of human interdependence effectively entails the recognition of how we have been situated in webs of dependence on others and how relationships of interdependence, in an ongoing way, contribute to our well-being (or lack thereof) and offer opportunities for us to give of ourselves in ways that are felt to be meaningful and valuable. Just as the acknowledgment of temporality leads

individuals to consider that the concepts of *cause* and *influence* must enter into an account of how lives take shape in time, so the acknowledgment of dependence promotes the idea that *need* and *desire* are not experiential states or modalities that can be transcended but are rather ongoing aspects of human experience that must be accommodated in the pursuit and cultivation of the good life.

3 **Stanley Cavell and the Dialectic of Acknowledgement and Avoidance**

“The direction out from illusion is not up, at any rate not up to one fixed morning star; but down, at any rate along each chain of a day’s denial. Philosophy (as descent) can thus be said to leave everything as it is because it is a refusal of, say disobedient to, (a false) ascent, or transcendence. Philosophy (as ascent) shows the violence that is to be refused (disobeyed), that has left everything not as it is, indifferent to me, as if there are things in themselves.” (Cavell, 1989)

I have spoken of the existential challenge and developmental work of adulthood as the *acknowledgment* of temporality and dependence. At this juncture, it will be useful to explicate what is meant by this term and, in this regard, I have followed Stanley Cavell with respect to the distinction that he draws and builds upon between “knowing” and “acknowledging.” According to Cavell, whereas knowing entails an active, assertive, aggressive orientation toward its object, acknowledging is characterized by a more indirect, patient and receptive stance. On this view, the temporality and interdependence of human existence are not to be considered as matters to be known, intellectually confirmed or deductively derived. They constitute a set of facts, conditions, and relationships which either are acknowledged or are not acknowledged. Furthermore, for Cavell, the failure to acknowledge is not to be understood as analogous to the failure to know: “A ‘failure to know’ might just mean a piece of ignorance, an absence of something, a blank. A ‘failure to acknowledge’ is the presence of something, a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion,

a coldness.” (1969, 264) The alternative to acknowledgment is not ignorance but, rather, avoidance, denial, or refusal (1979, 389).

A further aspect of Cavell’s discussion of acknowledgment and avoidance pertains to an important, though not always explicitly formulated, conception of the temporal relationships between them. This sense of temporality surfaces typically at those moments when Cavell aims to express the difficulties human beings encounter in connection with acknowledging each other. He writes: “Acknowledgment of another calls for recognition of the other’s specific relation to oneself and this entails the revelation of oneself as having denied or distorted that relation.” (1979, 428) According to Cavell, acknowledgment involves the guilty acceptance of a *preceding* state of affairs in which the reality of the other had been avoided or disavowed; that is, acknowledgment emerges in time against a pre-existing background characterized by refusal or denial.

Cavell goes further in charting the temporality intrinsic to the dialectic of avoidance and acknowledgment by situating this dialectic in a developmental, life-historical framework. In several contexts, he describes avoidance as a position especially characteristic of “youth” and, accordingly, he treats the emergence of acknowledgment as the event that heralds the passage to adulthood and signifies the human being’s readiness to assume those developmental tasks regarded as constitutive of maturity. In this connection, Cavell writes of “(t)he task of wanting and choosing adulthood” and that “(t)he necessity of the task is the choice of finitude, which for us (even after God) means, the acknowledgment of the existence of finite others, which is to say, the choice of community...” (1979, 464)

Yet, while Cavell would certainly agree that the journey from adolescence to adulthood typically involves the acceptance of realities and responsibilities once evaded or rejected, he does not wish to advance any linear, stage-based, naturalistic conception of growth. He insists that “youth is not alone a phase of individual development but a dimension of human existence as such.” (1990, 52) In Cavell’s view, human beings do not once and for all transcend and leave behind them those states of being taken as paradigmatic of adolescence.

Although Cavell treats adolescence as a recurring way of being in the world rather than merely a stage of development and claims that irreversible transition to adulthood is an impossibility, he does offer a very specific view of the conditions under which human beings, at least temporarily, flourish by embracing “community.” At the heart of his view is the notion that maturity, adulthood, as a vulnerable position and not a permanently established stage, is attained as a function of the capacity to mourn, to accept the losses that the acknowledgment of others entails. And, about this capacity, Cavell suggests: “Learning mourning may be the achievement of a lifetime” (1987, 172).

4 Beyond Illusions in the Transition to Adulthood

“Every experience worthy of the name runs counter to our expectation. Thus the historical nature of man contains as an essential element a fundamental negativity that emerges in the relation between experience and insight. Insight is more than the knowledge of this or that situation. It always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive...Real experience is that in which man becomes aware of his finiteness. In it are discovered the limits of the power...of his planning reason. It proves to be an illusion that everything can be reversed, that there is always time for everything...‘To recognize what is’ does not mean to recognize what is just at this moment there, but to have insight into the limitations within which the future is still open to expectation and planning...Thus true experience is that of one’s own historicity.” (Gadamer, 1975)

As we have seen, Cavell posited that acknowledgment and, by extension, adulthood, entail the acceptance of a preceding state of affairs or mode of being characterized not by ignorance but by avoidance. In addition, Cavell referred to “the task of wanting and choosing adulthood,” thereby underlining the notion that the acknowledgment that constitutes adulthood entails desire and consent, yearning and commitment. With this in view, are we to conclude that, prior to (or in the absence of) the psychological, ethical or spiritual maturity that may be attained in adulthood, human beings seek to avoid the facts of temporality and, correlatively, aim to disavow the interdependence that characterizes human life? Are we to conclude that human beings, before the acknowledgment and insight that optimally emerge in adulthood, are somehow, to use a term used by both Cavell and Gadamer, captivated by *illusions* about the conditions of their existence and the degree of their control over their well-being? Now, what could be meant by conclusions of this sort?

Before taking up this question, however, it would be important to affirm two things about the acknowledgment of temporality and interdependence in adulthood. First, it seems that it would not be in accord with our intuitions to presume that, prior to adulthood, human beings have no intimations whatsoever regarding the facts associated with their being situated in time in relations of interpersonal dependence. It seems entirely likely that there are indeed moments in which children, adolescents and emerging adults encounter the dimension of temporality and become aware of their finitude and their interdependence with others. Yet, moments of awareness are not equivalent to the existential acknowledgment that we are referring to here. There is a need to distinguish between *intimations* which have a short-lived existential impact and *insights* which entail a deep process of acceptance and a (relatively) enduring transformation of the way human beings construe their lives.

Second, it seems that it would be equally incorrect to suggest that the transition to mature adulthood is achieved in one fell swoop, one irreversible step into the future which, once and forever, establishes a radical discontinuity with that which has come before. While it is the case that there are moments in our early adulthood in which the decisions we take, and the commitments we make, represent critical turning points, one would not necessarily want to claim that, with these decisions and commitments, we bring ourselves to a complete acknowledgment of our temporal and social nature. Indeed, the concept of complete acknowledgment seems to be an impossibility for human beings and it is more plausible to assume that the appropriation of temporality and dependence,

while getting underway with the new roles and responsibilities undertaken in early adulthood, constitutes, to use Cavell's phrase, the developmental "achievement of a lifetime."

Let us now return to our earlier questions: Are we to conclude that, prior to (or in the absence of) the psychological, ethical or spiritual maturity that may be attained in adulthood, human beings seek to avoid the facts of temporality and, correlatively, aim to disavow the interdependence that characterizes human life? Are we to conclude that human beings, before the acknowledgment and insight that optimally emerge in adulthood, are somehow captivated by illusions about the conditions of their existence and the degree of their control over their well-being? We may begin by recalling what was said above when we outlined various aspects of the concept of the acknowledgment of temporality and of dependence.

The first aspect specified above concerned the idea of finitude and, along with it, the fact that each of us is given but one, and only one, life course to live. While human beings of all ages may find themselves having avoided these realities of existence, there is reason to believe that, typically, a deeply felt acknowledgment of them is only set in motion when individuals take up those adult questions having to do with how, and with whom, they wish to spend (the rest of) their lives and what values they wish to embrace and transmit to others. It seems evident that human beings are not born with a sense of their lives as a finite and cohesive whole, as having a beginning, a middle and an end, and that, on their way to the maturity that may come in adulthood, human beings do, at times, appear to believe, at some level, that they will always have a second chance at

life, an opportunity to erase altogether the histories they have already lived and to chart an entirely new path into the future.

The other aspects of the acknowledgment of temporality identified above concern the acceptance of being situated in a variety of causal chains or series of different orders of complexity. This was said to entail the recognition that our lived experience is, at least in part, an effect of or response to antecedent events and influences. Now, some critical implications of this recognition are that the shape and course of our lives are not entirely within our control, that our well-being is, in important ways, a contingent matter and that we are, to some extent, hostages to fortune. Furthermore, it follows that these insights regarding dependency on aspects of the world external to the self and limitations with respect to the scope of human freedom are accompanied by a sense of the vulnerability of the goodness of our lives (Nussbaum, 1986).

It seems evident that human beings of all ages, to a greater or a lesser extent, typically wish both to avoid feeling vulnerable and to experience a sense of being in control of their lives. Moreover, it is plausible to suppose that these two wishes are intertwined with each other: when individuals experience less personal control they are likely to feel more vulnerable and, accordingly, more inclined to disavow awareness of the sources of such vulnerability. From a developmental point of view, we have grown accustomed to recognizing the pre-adult years of life as ones in which experiences of vulnerability are particularly acute. It takes time and the right conditions for individuals to be able to establish a stable sense of personal autonomy and confidence in their capacity to pursue

meaningful lives and, until such developmental achievements are realized, the idea that one is situated in time and with others and, thereby, subject to one's history and indebted to the formative (and potentially deformative) influences of preceding generations, may be difficult to bear. It is in this regard that it is suggested that, before the maturity that may come during adulthood, individuals are highly motivated to avoid the acknowledgment of temporality and dependence and that this avoidance may be expressed in illusory beliefs that they are self-creating and self-sufficient, that their well-being has not been and is not contingent upon the contributions and provisions of others.

4 Eriksonian Views on the Emergence of Generativity in Adulthood

“[T]he voices of our ancestors continue to make themselves heard among the living and in this way ensure, not only the transmission of wisdom, but its intimate personal reception at every stage. This dimension, which could be called *generational*, is an undeniable component of the phenomenon of injunction and, all the more so, of that of indebtedness.” (Ricoeur, 1992)

At the end of his essay entitled “Human Strength and the Cycle of Generations”, in his volume on *Insight and Responsibility*, Erik Erikson concluded his reflections in the following way:

“[T]he individual ego can be strong only through a mutual guarantee of strength given to and received by all whose life-cycles intertwine. Whatever chance man may have to transcend the limitations of his ego seems to depend on his prior ability...to be fully engaged in the sequence of generations.” (1964, 157)

In these two summary sentences, Erikson proposes that, developmentally, the emergence of a strong ego is linked to the transcendence of the ego’s limitations and that this strength-through-transcendence ultimately rests upon optimal (“fully engaged”) participation in intergenerational relationships. Although Erikson wanted to insist upon an epigenetic account of human development, an account which posits that “vital virtues” (also referred to as “basic strengths” and “essential ego qualities”) unfold according to a ground plan in an invariant sequence of stages, he also wanted to affirm that this unfolding is contingent upon the nature of the contributions of the social world in which the individual is situated. Moreover, while Erikson advanced his psychosocial perspective by offering analyses of how individuals interact with the traditions and institutions

which constitute their society, in the end, I believe, he wished to stress that the basic dynamic relations are personal and intergenerational ones. That is to say, the fundamental conceptualization that seems to emerge in Erikson's work concerns the ways in which the lives of individuals belonging to different generations move together through time by way of an intricate web of mutually activating and facilitating interconnections.

“[M]an's psychosocial survival is safeguarded only by vital virtues which develop in the interplay of successive and overlapping generations, living together in organized settings. Here, living together means more than incidental proximity. It means that the individual's life-stages are “inter-living,” cogwheeling with the stages of others which move him along as he moves them.” (1964, 114)

At the heart of Erikson's view of adulthood and of adult development is his conception of “generativity.” On his view, the “core crisis” or “critical antithesis” that constitutes the fundamental site of the normative psychic work of adulthood is the felt tension between generativity and “self-absorption” or “stagnation.” Erikson held that, subsequent and further to the successful emergence of intimacy in young adulthood, human beings are epigenetically oriented to reach beyond themselves and to transcend the limitations of their egos. Such self-transcendence, in his view, is most commonly pursued in the context of a growing concern to procreate and to provide for the well-being of one's offspring. However, in addition to identifying parenthood as the prime activity within which generativity is sought and experienced, Erikson wished to include other modes of creative activity which permit the generation and transmission of an infinite variety of products or ideas judged as embodying value and, therefore,

deserving of being regarded as a worthwhile legacy. It may be said that Erikson's conception of generativity, and his intergenerational focus more broadly, permit, in a certain sense, a two-fold transcendence: on the one hand, generativity is self-transcending *interpersonally* insofar as it constitutes an orientation toward the flourishing of others (and, thus, opposes "self-absorption") and, on the other hand, it is self-transcending *temporally* insofar as it constitutes an orientation toward the future, a future which extends beyond the individual's own, finite life course (and, thus, opposes "stagnation").

According to Erikson, the successful negotiation and resolution of the core crisis or critical antithesis of each stage permits the evolution of specific vital virtues. That virtue which corresponds to and emerges during the adult struggle to affirm generativity is "care" and this is defined (in process terms) by Erikson as "a widening commitment to take care of the persons, the products, and the ideas one has learned to care for" (1982, 67). Moreover, it is valuable to note that, in addition to characterizing care as the virtue resulting from the resolution of the generativity crisis, Erikson introduces the idea that there exists an "antipathic trend" corresponding to the "sympathic trend" of care (Erikson, 1982, 68). This he refers to as "rejectivity" and describes it as "the unwillingness to include specified persons or groups in one's generative concern—one does not care to care for them" (1982, 68). While Erikson suggests that "we cannot ever be generative and careful without being selective to the point of some distinct rejectivity" (1982, 68), he asserts that rejectivity poses a major threat to individual and social well being.

“The conflict between generativity and rejection...is the strongest ontogenetic anchor of the universal human propensity that I have called *pseudospeciation*(:)...the conviction (and the impulses and actions based on it) that another type or group of persons are, by nature, history, or divine will, a species different from one’s own—and dangerous to mankind itself.” (1982, 69)

For Erikson, this realization of the dynamics of rejectivity establishes adulthood as that period in which human beings optimally deepen their sense of ethical responsibility. This responsibility entails striving for an “all-human awareness” (1982, 107), “a one human specieshood” (1982, 95).

In light of Erikson’s assertion that, despite their epigenetic origin and ordering, the emergence of the vital virtues is contingent upon the contributions of the social world (or, as he says, upon “the charity of fate”), what are his views concerning the factors that influence the successful resolution of the core crisis of adulthood and the affirmation of generativity? As it turns out, this is a question that Erikson chose not to explore in great detail. There are, however, two sets of statements in his essay on “Human Strength and the Cycle of Generations” which offer suggestions in this connection. First, in the context of his discussion of the advent of the vital virtue of love during the first adult stage, he states:

“[L]ove in its evolutionary and generational sense is...the transformation of the love received through the preadolescent stage of life into the care given to others during adult life...(T)he problem is one of transferring the experience of being cared for in a parental setting, in which one happened to grow up, to a new, an adult affiliation which is actively chosen and cultivated as a mutual concern.” (1964, 127-8)

Now, even though Erikson refers to and describes general processes of “transformation” and “transfer,” he does not here provide an account of how the shift from “love received” to “care given” comes about or of what factors

contribute to the success of this transition. Second, in the context of statements regarding motherhood, which I believe may be extended more broadly to parenthood and to generativity, Erikson states:

“[T]he mother’s (generative adult’s) own past has left her with the wish and the necessity to pass on that...which emanated from her mother (parents)...and from her culture.” (1964, 152)

With this statement, Erikson endorses the view that the adult’s capacity for generativity is a function of his or her reception of generative care from the preceding generation as supported by a culture which affirms the virtue of care as the primary concern of adulthood. We are left, however, with a need to clarify the character and dynamics of this intergenerational transmission and reception.

In the balance of this section, I wish to refer to the work of George Vaillant on adult development and to three recent empirical studies of generativity which bear directly on the concerns of this thesis. For over two decades, Vaillant (1977, 1993) has attempted to explore and to extend, empirically and theoretically, Erik Erikson’s epigenetic conception of development in adulthood. One aspect of his work that is especially relevant here concerns his view of the conditions under which development generally, and adult development in particular, takes place. Before presenting his thoughts on this, it will be useful to offer some preliminary remarks about how Vaillant views the evolving periods of adulthood.

Following Erikson, Vaillant agrees that the first developmental task of young adulthood concerns the achievement of intimacy. Unlike Erikson, however, who posited that from intimacy adults go on to face the crisis over generativity,

Vaillant suggested that there is an interim period during which career consolidation is the principal psychic preoccupation and site of developmental work. This is important because, according to Vaillant, the generativity that, optimally, follows during the middle years of adulthood requires successful responses to the challenges posed by intimacy and career consolidation. On his view, the transition to generativity represents a fundamental developmental watershed. While he characterizes generativity in terms of “selfless”, “giving-away processes”, he describes the preceding developmental periods in reference to “selfish”, “collecting processes for the self.” (1993, 189) In a sense, before an individual is able to feel that he or she possesses something of value which may be passed along in the care given to others in the succeeding generation, he or she needs to establish a self which is felt to be inwardly rich and capable of making contributions recognized as having worth. It is this building up of the self and of the esteem in which the self regards itself that Vaillant posits is the aim of pre-generative, selfish, collecting processes.

In the context of the presentation of his model of adult development—as he attempts to respond to the questions: “How does the ego mature?” and “What allows the giving-away process to begin?”—Vaillant distinguishes his approach from two others. The rejected models are designated as neurobiologic and environmental and the perspective he advocates is referred to as the assimilation or imprinting model. According to Vaillant, adult development proceeds to intimacy and then on through career consolidation as a function of the individual’s relative capacity to identify with and internalize others who are

deemed to have worth and who are felt to promote the value of the individual's selfhood. In more experiential terms, Vaillant claims that we grow to the extent that we allow ourselves to take others in, to digest and make use of their experiences, their hope and their strength: "To grow, we need to feel enriched by those we have loved. We need to feel gratitude, not envy or resentment." (1993, 181) Moreover, in addition to gratefully taking in those persons who come to touch us and foster a sense of hope in our own developmental possibilities, Vaillant insists that we need to grieve for those individuals whom we have loved and lost. As he states, "Grief and assimilation of people are intimately, if paradoxically, entwined." (1993, 345)

I turn now to the three empirical studies I referred to above. The first study I wish to consider was undertaken by Dan McAdams, Ann Diamond, Ed de St. Aubin and Elizabeth Mansfield (1997). These researchers conducted in depth interviews with 70 adult individuals, 40 of whom had been identified as manifesting a high level of generativity. These interviews were seen as a way of gaining access to and exploring the life stories or narratives individuals tell, to themselves and to others, in the ongoing work of articulating and sustaining a sense of coherence and meaning in their lives. While McAdams and his associates examined these interviews in order to determine whether the highly generative group differed from their less generative counterparts with regard to a variety of aspects of the life stories, I wish to mention only one of their findings here. Specifically, the finding that is of interest to us in the present context is that, in their reconstructions of their life histories, the highly generative adults were

significantly more likely to provide an account which conveyed the grateful sense of having received and having been the beneficiary of what the researchers called a “family blessing”—“a special advantage, blessing, or positive identification”—“that singled him or her out in a positive way in the family” (McAdams, 1997). Now, quite apart from the issue of the “historical accuracy” of this memory, McAdams and his associates suggest that the life narrative may be considered in connection with how it functions in relation to and contributes to the individual’s projects in the present:

“[This] story would appear to be a highly effective life-narrative form for supporting an adult’s generative efforts...The adult who works hard to guide and foster the next generation may make sense of his or her strong commitment in terms of a story that suggests that he or she has been “called,” or summoned, to do good things for others, that such a calling is deeply rooted in childhood.” (McAdams, 1997)

In the second study, Bill Peterson and Abigail Stewart (1996) explored some of the possible antecedents of what they called “generativity motivation.” More specifically, these researchers aimed to examine, among other questions, the relationship between the expression of gratitude for the beneficial influence of particular others and the presence, years later, of a generative desire to contribute to the well-being of society. Toward this end, they developed a measure of generativity motivation in a group of women 48 years of age. These women had originally been studied as undergraduate students at Radcliffe in the early sixties and had been followed up on a number of occasions prior to the meetings held with them at age 48. On one of these earlier occasions, at age 31, the women had been asked about the influence of others on their lives. Their responses were then

processed in such a way that participants could be differentiated in terms of the degree to which each person recognized the positive influence of others. Peterson and Stewart (1996) discovered that relatively generative women at midlife (age 48) were more likely than other women to acknowledge the influence of other persons in their autobiographical accounts seventeen years earlier. Specifically, the results obtained indicated that there was a highly significant relationship between the acknowledgment with gratitude of the influence of mentors at age 31 and the degree of generativity motivation expressed at 48. According to the authors of this study, this longitudinal correlation spanning a period of nearly twenty years, is to be taken as evidence of the importance of “intergenerational links” in the emergence of generativity. They suggest that “generative ideals” are transmitted from one generation to the next by way of positive role models and that individuals, as part of their grateful response to the mentoring they have received and benefited from, may come to feel that they themselves wish to make contributions to the well-being and development of future generations.

In another study of the same group of women, Bill Peterson (2002) explored the relationship between the degree to which the women had realized generative aims at age 43 and their subjective experience of intergenerational and caregiving relations ten years later. It was discovered that the relatively more generative women rated the roles of mother, daughter and grandmother as more important to them than did the less generative women and that the degree of generativity was related to reports of greater satisfaction in both the roles of parent and of daughter. Moreover, Peterson found that the more generative

women at 43 were more inclined than their less generative peers to claim at 53 that they had a need to help others by giving of themselves and that they themselves needed the supportive care of others and were satisfied with the quality of the care given to them. On the basis of the results of his analyses, Peterson proposed that “generative individuals feel embedded in an intergenerational network” and that they participate more extensively in relations of reciprocal caregiving. He offers the following statement concerning the problematic of his research:

“[A]cknowledging a generative responsibility for the care of younger people presupposes that an individual understands the importance of intergenerational bonds. Generative individuals should recognize that they are part of a lineage of caregiving efforts. They were cared for as children, and they themselves are now caring for the next generation...” (Peterson, 2002)

Although Erik Erikson’s epigenetic theory has come under extensive critical scrutiny over the years, he deserves unambiguous recognition for having been the first contemporary theorist to systematically extend developmental conceptualization into adulthood and across the entire life course (Hoare, 2002). Moreover, his characterization of the psychic work of adulthood in reference to the concept of generativity has proven to be a lasting contribution and is being explored in an ongoing way by a variety of researchers (Kotre, 1984, 1999; McAdams and de St. Aubin, 1998; Snarey, 1993).

In the first section of this thesis I indicated that the view to be articulated is based on the claim that the existential challenge that is at the heart of adulthood relates to the progressive *acknowledgment of temporality and interdependence* as essential dimensions of human life. It should be evident that the generative adult

in Erikson's model is a person who has come to acknowledge such existential dimensions and who has chosen to engage in projects that reflect the temporal and interpersonal self-transcendence that generativity, by definition, involves. In this sense, an inquiry into the conditions of the emergence of generativity in adulthood would contribute to our understanding of the ways in which temporality and interdependence as dimensions of human existence come to be acknowledged.

In the latter part of the foregoing discussion of generativity, reference was made to the views of several writers, including Erikson himself, who have posited a link between the capacity for generativity and the capacity to experience gratitude for the ways others have contributed to one's development and well-being. Specifically, a caring orientation toward individuals in the next generation has been deemed to depend upon the ability of the caring person to understand that he or she is situated temporally in a sequence of generations and to acknowledge with gratitude how others who have come before have promoted his or her flourishing and access to the good life.

In the sections that follow I aim to contribute to our understanding of generativity in adulthood by examining, in a multi-disciplinary manner, the conditions under which gratitude becomes a deeply rooted experiential orientation and disposition. Specifically, I will suggest that the emergence of gratitude needs to be understood from a dynamic point of view. Just as Erikson insisted on formulating the psychic work of each developmental period in terms of a specific crisis or conflict between antithetical tendencies, I will propose that gratitude (and the inter-subjective posture of mind that it implies) emerges, if and when it does,

in relation to an opposing (solipsistic) yearning for absolute self-sufficiency. It will be suggested that this yearning for self-sufficiency constitutes an effort to establish and sustain a sense of personal power by denying any dependence on aspects of the world external to and beyond the control of the self. In this sense, then, if a person is to experience gratitude, he or she will have to renounce the yearning for self-sufficiency and grant that his or her well-being is contingent upon the reception of goods having their source outside the boundaries of the self. Moreover, this intertwined disengagement and acknowledgment will be viewed as entailing a transformation in the individual's sense of the relations between self and world and in the very manner in which existence is felt to have worth or value.

6 The Concept of “the Good Life”

“Friendship in the truest sense is friendship between good men...[I]n loving a friend (people) are loving their own good. For when a good man becomes a friend to another he becomes that other’s good; so each loves his own good, and repays what he receives by wishing the good of the other and giving him pleasure. There is a saying ‘friendship is equality’, and these qualities belong especially to the friendship of good men.” (Aristotle, 1976, VIII, 5)

In a sense, this thesis proposes a way of thinking about the idea of “the good life.” Insofar as this concept has been employed in a variety of diverse contexts and is likely, therefore, to evoke a multiplicity of associations, I wish to clarify that in the present essay I shall be using this phrase fundamentally as it has been used in philosophical explorations of certain ethical issues. Specifically, I have in mind those reflections, both ancient and modern, which take up and aim to respond to such questions as “How should one live?” and “What constitutes a well-lived life?” (Almeder, 2000; Annas, 1993; Cottingham, 1998; Crisp, 1998; Williams, 1986)

In the context of these philosophical discussions, it has been understood that the concept of the good life refers not to the quality of discrete episodes lived through at specific moments in time but, rather, to the overall quality of a life, to how well a life *as a whole* is led and lived. In speaking of the good life, an assumption is made that it is both meaningful and valuable to distinguish between lives that are relatively well-lived and those that are lived relatively poorly, between lives that are, and are felt to be, worthwhile and rich with enjoyment and those that are not. Moreover, it is clear that distinctions and evaluations of this

kind are made not only within the context of abstract philosophical debate. Indeed, it is the case that human beings, during the course of their lives, engage in ethical reflection on the nature of the good life and on the extent to which their actual lives coincide with what they take to be possible, with what they envision as optimal. Now, although one may ask about how a person of any age conceives of the good life and evaluates his or her own particular pattern of living, implicit in the view of philosophical inquiries is the idea that questions of the kind mentioned in the opening paragraph refer specifically to *adult* agents who have become able to conceive of the life course as a whole and who have had an opportunity to recognize certain ineluctable or structural features and constraints of the human condition. Indeed, Aristotle in his *Nichomachean Ethics*, on the basis of his conviction that the goodness of a life is always to some extent contingent on external factors and hence subject to reversal, wondered whether lives can be judged as good if they are still incomplete, that is, before they reach their end.

The idea of the good life contains within it an interesting and meaningful ambiguity. On the one hand, the phrase refers to a life judged to be happy or flourishing. In reflections on the good life one set of concerns to be considered relates to the character of those lives which are experienced and regarded as well-lived and worthwhile, as deeply satisfying and filled with a sense of value. On the other hand, the concept of the good life may be understood as referring to a life that is morally good, that is, a life in which the person has developed a virtuous character and relates to others in an ethical manner. Whereas in the first approach

to the idea of the good life there is an orientation to the well-being of the person himself or herself, in the second the focus is upon the person's concern for the well-being of others. Different articulations of the good life have related these two readings of the concept in different ways. While certain views have insisted that the emphasis on and pursuit of individual well-being cannot be reconciled with, and may even conflict with, the capacity to regard others morally, other views have argued that the two orientations cannot be severed and, indeed, are linked intrinsically in a meaningful way (Brink, 1999; Hunt, 1999). According to this latter perspective, flourishing lives necessarily entail a moral concern for the well-being of others—only virtuous persons lead truly worthwhile, well-lived lives—and, conversely, the capacity to respond ethically to the needs and rights of others requires that the person enjoys his or her life and feels that it is meaningful—only genuinely happy persons are capable of being morally good to others.

7 Receptivity in Flourishing and in Ethical Attention

“The good life is...the life lived with a sense of our dual nature as active and passive beings, bent on achieving the goals we espouse, but also liable to be surprised by forms of good we never anticipated...The basic point is that, if we give life a chance, it always turns out to be richer in possibilities than the idea we have at the time of what it would be to flourish...Developing over the course of a lifetime, our good is in large part the fruit of experiences we stumble into...The good life outruns the reach of planning because its very nature is to be the child of time.” (Larmore, 1999)

“Thus the ethical relation of asymmetrical reciprocity looks like this...We mutually recognize one another and aim to understand one another...A condition of our communication is that we acknowledge that others drag behind them shadows and histories, scars and traces, that do not become present in our communication. Thus we each must be open to learning about the other person’s perspective...Certainly communication and moral respect require some sense of mutual identification and sharing. But without also a moment of *wonder*, of openness to the newness and mystery of the other person, the creative energy of desire dissolves into indifference.” (Young, 1997)

Building upon this dialectical conception of the good life, the view to be explored here will emphasize two ways in which an orientation or posture entailing *receptivity* figures into the good life. Following the ambiguity referred to above, we will inquire about the place of receptivity in both the phenomenology of happiness and in that interpersonal moral practice that has come to be designated by some as “ethical attention” (Bowden, 1997).

First, in contrast with those stoic views, both ancient and modern, which insist that the flourishing life is one characterized by the achievement of independence and self-sufficiency the perspective being developed here maintains that need and dependency are aspects of the human condition that can never be

totally eliminated or transcended. Any view that would wish to locate neediness exclusively in the years of childhood has failed to recognize that critical aspects of human well-being entail an ongoing dependence upon parts of the world external to the person (Baier, 1997; Ignatieff, 1985; MacIntyre, 1999). This view does not deny that activities based upon and deploying a capacity for autonomy do not figure highly in the overall structure of a well-lived, enjoyable life. Clearly, the development of a separate identity and the ability to actively use one's talents and skills in the pursuit and realization of one's goals and plans represent essential components and conditions of happiness. However, in addition to that dimension of human life characterized by practical reason and independent action, it is critical to acknowledge that other modality of the good life in which the person needs, is dependent on and benefits from contributions originating outside the boundaries of the self (Nussbaum, 1986; Larmore, 1999). We shall designate this modality here as that of receptivity and we will posit that among the experiences human beings come to value most, and which arguably represent critical constituents of the good life, are those which entail a trusting openness to and reception of the contributions of other persons and aspects of the world beyond the control of the individual. People often come to prize those encounters in which they find themselves being (or having been) meaningfully affected, enriched and transformed by events felt to entail a sense of novelty and otherness.

The second sense in which a receptive orientation or posture forms part of the good life regards the nature of ethical responsiveness to others. Just as the first sense of receptivity was introduced by way of a contrast with stoic views which

construe human flourishing as independence and self-sufficiency, it may be useful to introduce the second sense by contrasting the view to be adopted here with what might be called a stoic conception of morality. Whereas the latter conceives of the moral agent as acting responsibly on the basis of an essentially detached, reflective assessment of his or her duties and obligations relative to the claims and rights of others, the perspective being developed here maintains that human beings ethically respond to others prior to and independently of their intellectual calculation of what others are owed. In the context of our lived encounters with other persons our sense of responsibility is not adequately described in terms of a contract into which we voluntarily enter. Instead, it is maintained that the actual sites of everyday moral life are those interpersonal encounters in which individuals respond on the basis of their attentiveness to the needs of others and to the particularity of their concrete, lived experience. This ethical attention, then, does not have the character of disengaged deliberation but, rather, is best described as a spontaneous, prereflective, compassionate receptivity to the existential situation of another human being. This receptivity is characterized by an openness to the other, by a recognition of the other's neediness and by a readiness to respond and contribute to his or her well-being (Bauman, 1993; Margalit, 2002).

These two kinds of receptivity have in common a specific conception of how human beings are related to one another. In contrast with those essentially stoic views which exclusively valorize the dimension of separateness and independence and which, as a result, give priority to postures entailing a sense of

agency and control, the view that is of interest here underscores the extent to which persons affect and are affected by each other. From this perspective, the boundaries of the self are not viewed as barriers to contact but as open and permeable. When human beings find themselves caring deeply for others, a critical aspect or moment of their care entails a stance of receptivity, of being open to those expressions which convey the other person's needs and hopes. There is a willingness to let oneself receive and attend to the predicament of the other and thereby to become a participant in the other's ongoing efforts to realize their own well-being. Similarly, when human beings reflect on those experiences which provide them with a sense that their lives are meaningful and which promote a sense of their personal flourishing, most would be inclined to include among these experiences those characterized by the reception of contributions stemming from contact with others or parts of the external world. Implicit in these experiences is the recognition that one source of the quality of one's living is an openness to influences originating beyond the self. In sum, while certain views strive to preserve a purified image of human beings standing alone and self-sufficient, untouched and therefore unsullied by factors beyond their control, the view that is being proposed here is one of impurity and porosity, of human beings who affirm their ongoing interdependence with others, who acknowledge the critical ways their own lives are enriched by other persons and of how they themselves wish to make themselves useful to others (Walker, 1991).

8 Gratitude and the Good Life

“It is exchange that holds (people) together. That is why they set up a temple of the Graces in a public place to encourage the repayment of benefits; this is the distinguishing mark of gratitude, because it is right both to repay a service to a benefactor and at another time to take the initiative in benefaction.” (Aristotle, 1976, V, 5, 1132)

“If the recipient’s grateful response...affirms the goodness of what the donor has done, does this not imply a commitment by the recipient to similar action, not just to reestablish equality with the donor, but simply to increase in the world the goodness...which both donor and recipient affirm?” (Camenisch, 1981)

The preceding discussion of receptivity as an important modality both with respect to flourishing and to ethical attention now permits us to return to the principal theme of this thesis. This theme is that of gratitude, specifically the place of gratitude in the good life and the conditions under which it becomes a feature of such a life. Before elaborating on this, however, it needs to be said that, insofar as the concept of gratitude is used in many ways in ordinary and in theoretical discourse, in the present context our concern is not primarily with the culturally transmitted conventions pertaining to the situational assessment of whether gratitude is due or how it is to be expressed. While the cultural articulation and regulation of gratitude as a feature of communication between individuals is a matter of considerable interest, the emphasis here is on the phenomenology and genealogy of gratitude as *grateful subjectivity*. In connection with the question of phenomenology, the aim is to explore the nature and dynamics of gratitude as an experiential state and as a mode of construing the self and its relations with others. Implicit in this is the view that, quite apart from the

ways in which gratitude may surface as a relatively transitory feature of our daily interpersonal exchanges, gratitude as a relatively deeply felt and abiding subjective disposition occupies a place of considerable significance in the organization of the good life. With regard to the question of genealogy, the assumption is that gratitude is not a basic emotional reaction which is manifest at birth independent of specific social experiences, but one which is cultivated and has its advent in the context of ongoing ethical relations with others. Gratitude does not emerge naturally and inevitably as the result of some unfolding, linear developmental process but emerges and is sustained only as a function of contingent interpersonal and intrapersonal practices and processes.

We may now relate gratitude to the earlier comments made about the good life and the role of receptivity therein. It was suggested that a characterization of human flourishing needs to go beyond the recognition of activities which confirm a person's sense of self-sufficiency and promote the realization of his or her goals. An account of the good life must also include those experiences which entail a valued encounter with an aspect of the external world or, more specifically, an openness to and reception of an initiative having its origin beyond the boundaries of the self which is felt to benefit and contribute to the well-being of the individual. The individual's felt sense of being the recipient of a good voluntarily bestowed upon him or her by another who is recognized as separate and, therefore, outside the orbit of his or her control is precisely what we will take to be the basic structure and meaning of gratitude. In this connection, then, gratitude will be understood as an *intrinsic* part of the good life. If we accept that an

account of the good life must include those experiences characterized by openness to and reception of external goods, and if gratitude is that subjective experience which follows upon such openness and reception (and, indeed, represents the person's conscious acknowledgment of being the recipient of an external good), then gratitude will be a necessary component or constituent of the good life.

Now, in addition to affirming that gratitude constitutes an intrinsic feature of a person's flourishing, this thesis advances a further proposition, namely, that gratitude also functions *instrumentally* as a necessary condition of the good life. In the preceding section it was maintained that the ethical attention which embodies our prereflective responsiveness to others is characterized by a compassionate openness and receptivity to their needs in the context of their efforts to lead good lives. The proposition to be considered is that only an individual who has received with gratitude the ethical attention of others, others who thus were oriented toward promoting the flourishing of that individual, will be capable of regarding others with that ethical attention that constitutes moral responsiveness. The implication here is that a person's moral goodness is contingent upon his or her grateful reception of the compassionate responsiveness of others and, furthermore, that such grateful reception is to be understood as necessarily including within it the person's acknowledgment of his or her neediness and lack of self-sufficiency and, correlatively, of the dependency of his or her well-being on the availability of others who are ready to offer their ethical attention.

The instrumental role of gratitude which we have just discussed need not be restricted to the good life construed as moral regard for the well-being of others. Indeed, a broader position may be put forward. Specifically, it can be argued that the acknowledgment of gratitude in relation to the ethical attention bestowed by others may also be viewed as a necessary condition of the good life construed as personal flourishing or well-being. If we are prepared to count as a central feature of the well-lived life the capacity to be open toward aspects of the world external to the self and to gratefully receive the ways in which they affect and transform us, and if such openness and reception imply a recognition of dependence on benefits derived from outside the self, then one might reasonably propose that such a recognition of dependence would have to include and be founded upon a deeper acknowledgment of neediness, one linked to a fundamental need for ethical attention. This is to say that, unless human beings are the recipients of the ethical attention of others and come to feel grateful for this attention, then their capacity to realize those central features of the good life entailing openness, receptivity and gratitude may suffer as a result.

9 The Concept of the Gift

“The claim of need has nothing to do with deserving; it rests on people’s necessity, not on their merit, on their poor common humanity, not on their capacity to evoke pathos...What a man needs he does not earn or deserve. The ground zero of human obligation is that this common humanity is reason enough for a claim on another’s superfluity...Love is a gift, not a debt.” (Ignatieff, 1985)

“[I]s not the gift...[t]hat which opens the circle so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry?...It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the...very figure of the impossible...[I]f the gift is another name of the impossible, we still think it, we name it, we desire it. We intend it...Even if the gift were never anything but a simulacrum, one must still *render an account* of the possibility of this simulacrum and of the desire that impels toward this simulacrum.” (Derrida, 1992)

It was claimed above that gratitude may be construed as an individual’s felt sense of being the recipient of a good voluntarily bestowed upon him or her by another who is recognized as separate and, therefore, outside the orbit of the individual’s control. We will now extend this preliminary formulation by stating that, although gratitude may be felt or judged appropriate or necessary in response to a variety of situations, that form of grateful subjectivity of interest to us here is, by definition, a response to the reception of a *gift*: gratitude, both conceptually and experientially, depends upon the prior, regulative idea of the gift (or other, related, ideas which do the same regulative work, such as altruism or generosity) (Coles, 1997). That is, one requires the idea of the gift in conceptualizing the response of gratitude. Moreover, a person will respond gratefully only insofar as he or she construes himself or herself as the recipient of a gift bestowed by another (Berger, 1975; Camenisch, 1981; Card, 1988; Godbout, 1998; Meilaender,

1984; MacIntyre, 1999; Milbank, 1995). It is essential, then, to clarify what is meant by this idea on which the response of gratitude depends.

In the earlier discussion of the instrumental role of gratitude it was proposed that the realization of the good life, as flourishing and as moral goodness, is contingent upon the person's grateful reception of the ethical attention of others. If, as we are now claiming, grateful subjectivity constitutes a response to a gift, then it follows that ethical attention is to be regarded as a gift. In this vein, then, we may begin to clarify what is meant by the idea of gift by recalling aspects of what was said about this mode of moral responsiveness.

One of the ways in which ethical attention was distinguished from a stoic conception of moral responsibility was in connection with the suggestion that the former involves a non-contractual approach to the other. Whereas the stoic view conceives of morality, and of interpersonal relationships more generally, in terms of a legalistic or economic calculus of equal and reciprocal rights and obligations or debits and credits, ethical attention is characterized by an orientation toward the well-being of others that is not predicated upon and that does not entail a calculation of reciprocity or equality. Let us designate this orientation as *asymmetrical* and suggest that this is a useful starting point in thinking *normatively* about the idea of gift (Berger, 1975; Camenisch, 1981; Derrida, 1992; Milbank, 1995; Starobinski, 1997; Young, 1997).

There are two basic senses in which the giving of a gift constitutes an asymmetrical interpersonal orientation. First, gift-giving is asymmetrical in that it is construed as issuing forth from the freedom and autonomy of the giver and as

unconstrained by any factors other than the giver's fundamental wish and intention to bestow a benefit. It is not conditioned by any prior performance on the part of the recipient as a consequence of which it might be claimed that the recipient earned or deserved the benefit or obtained it as a result of manipulation or coercion. Second, gift-giving is asymmetrical in the sense that it is construed as self-transcending and thus essentially for the sake of the other, as inspired by the giver's unconditional care for another human being and by his or her desire to help and promote the well-being of this other person. Intrinsic to this criterion is the notion that the giver is not principally motivated by self-interest and does not require, expect or enjoy any form of reciprocity or return, even a response of gratitude, from his or her beneficiary (Caputo, 1999; Derrida, 1992; Hyde, 1983; Schrift, 1997).

At this juncture, it is important to indicate that the preceding explication of the notion of the gift in no way, conceptually or phenomenologically, requires the claims that certain persons are to be regarded as essentially or fundamentally givers or that an act construed as a gift must be pure in the sense of being wholly free of any symmetrical or reciprocal features (Milbank, 1995; Young, 1997). One might still construe an act as gift-giving even if the individual who performed it, in a different context, has responded in a self-serving way. Similarly, the fact that a person who offers a gift to another also derives pleasure from the thought of himself or herself as a benefactor need not erase or hopelessly contaminate the value and significance of the gift.

We have noted that the defining feature of gift-giving is that it is an asymmetrical gesture and that one meaning of this is that gifts are given with no strings attached. When a gift is bestowed it is understood, both from the giver's and the recipient's point of view, that the recipient is not thereby placed under an obligation to reciprocate or respond in turn. Indeed, if it turns out that a would-be giver has all along anticipated and counted on an expression of gratitude or some other form of compensation in response to his or her gesture, this expectation could rightly be construed as calling into question the status of the gesture as a gift. Similarly, if the would-be recipient responds to the bestowal of a genuine gift as if he or she had incurred a debt that had to be repaid and thereby discharged as quickly as possible, the recipient's experience of the bestowal as a gift could be regarded with not a little doubt.

Now, even though it is important to characterize gift-giving as asymmetrical and to insist that, with the reception of a gift, the recipient does not thereby incur an obligation, there is an important sense in which the recipient of a gift does become indebted and is implicitly called upon to respond in some way. The fact that ingratitude is universally condemned as an especially reprehensible offence (Shakespeare, 1608/2002; Hume, 1739-40/2000; Kant, 1797/1996) constitutes evidence supporting this intuition regarding the existence of a certain kind of obligation on the part of the recipient. One way of thinking about the kind of obligation or debt incurred by the recipient of a gift is to conceive of the gift as an invitation or an offer to enter into ethical relationship or community with the giver; this approach shifts the focus from giver and recipient as discrete

individuals to the two persons in relation with each other and to the ethical bond that now, by virtue of the gift, links them together (Berger, 1975; Camenisch, 1981; Meilander, 1984). Along these lines, the subjective experience of gratitude, a response which need not be expressed in the form of some direct communication to the giver, would signify an acceptance of the gift as invitation or offer. Moreover, while it seems important that neither the giver nor the recipient engages in a calculation regarding how the latter is to reciprocate or equalize the positions of the two parties immediately subsequent to the bestowal of the gift, it is just as important to allow for a certain form of hope on the part of the giver and, on the side of the recipient, a certain kind of wish to convey his or her sense of (non-compensatory) gratitude along with an affirmation of the value of gift-giving and of responding to others asymmetrically, that is, in a self-transcending way.

In addition to this apparent paradox regarding how the unconditional bestowal of a benefit can nonetheless give rise to a sense of indebtedness and obligation on the part of the recipient, we should take note at this time of a parallel paradox on the side of the giver. Although it was stated that gifts are offered freely and do not arise from any preexisting contract pertaining to rights and obligations, what shall we make of Ignatieff's (1985) claim, cited at the beginning of this section, that while the love (or the loving attention, in Murdoch's [1970] sense) that grounds and embodies morality is a gift and not a debt, human beings, nonetheless, have a fundamental obligation to respond to the needs of others? In this sense, human beings have an obligation of a certain sort to

give (to love), an obligation which exists prior to and independent of any contracts voluntarily entered into and which must be appropriated in such a way that the giving is felt to be entirely unconstrained and free.

10 The Danger of Reception: Aristotle and Kant on Self-sufficiency, Shame and Inequality

“Sensitive benefactors may want their beneficiaries *not* to feel indebted to them, for it alters their relationship...One misjudges benefactors in inferring their benevolence from their generosity. Genuine benevolence is incompatible with disregarding others’ willingness to become obligated. Those who lack such regard thereby lack respect.” (Card, 1988)

“The virtues which we need in order to achieve both our own goods and the goods of others through participation in such networks (of giving and receiving) only function as genuine virtues when their exercise is informed by an awareness of how power is distributed and of the corruptions to which its use is liable. Here as elsewhere in our lives we have to learn how to live both with and against the realities of power.” (MacIntyre, 1999)

The claim that the bestowal of a gift gives rise to a certain form of indebtedness and obligation on the side of the recipient does not alter in any respect the fundamental requirement that gifts, by definition, are offered unconditionally. Moreover, the recognition that the giver is to be allowed some form of hope that the act of giving will be accepted by the recipient as an offer to participate in an ethical relationship does not undermine the criterion that, in giving, givers are to be motivated principally, not by the expectation of repayment or return, but by the self-transcending wish to respond to the needs of others and thereby contribute to their well-being.

These considerations, however, do suggest that giving is a complicated and difficult act which requires, on the part of the giver, considerable discernment and an acknowledgment that care is to be taken lest his or her recipient comes to feel that in receiving a gift he or she has incurred an unwelcome debt which must

be discharged immediately. The giver needs to recognize that his or her current gift is being made in the context of the recipient's history of interpersonal relations, a history which is likely to have included within it, at least to some extent, interactions in which acts declared to be gifts actually entailed hidden expectations and obligations. In addition, givers need to grant that their recipients may be unwilling to whole-heartedly accept the benevolence motivating and embodied in their gifts, as the acceptance of this benevolence would oblige them to acknowledge the existence of needs they might otherwise, for reasons perhaps also stemming from their personal histories, prefer to minimize or disavow. Lastly, givers need to recognize that some recipients may be predisposed to doubt the self-transcending care expressed in and through gifts and may be suspicious that the act of giving, whether by design or as an unintended consequence, places them in an undesirable, shameful position of inferiority.

In light of these observations concerning the difficulties of giving and, correlatively, the dangers of reception, are we to conclude not only that as givers we should be as conscious as possible of the complexities of giving, but also that as potential recipients we should, in order to avoid altogether the pitfalls of being on the receiving end, do whatever we can to dodge those who might wish to make us their beneficiaries? Should we strive to be self-sufficient, to construe the good life as one that is built exclusively on the basis of independent planning and control and that refuses to attach value to external goods and the contributions of others? While the latter may seem to be an extreme position, it may be one that human beings in fact commonly adopt, if not consciously, then at an unconscious

level. As a way of further exploring these dangers of reception we turn to the views of Aristotle and Kant, arguably two of the most important figures in the history of moral philosophy.

In earlier sections Aristotle was quoted on two occasions. We saw that he conceived of true friendship as a relationship of reciprocal giving and receiving between individuals who construe themselves as equals. On the second occasion, it was noted that Aristotle emphasized the centrality of exchange in social cohesion and that he directly pointed to the importance of gratitude, both as the necessary repayment of benefits and as a condition for further generosity. However, in spite of his contributions concerning friendship and generosity, there is another aspect of his work which suggests that Aristotle was not entirely at ease with the acknowledgment of need and of interdependence.

In the context of his discussion of the virtue of liberality in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states:

“[I]t is more the mark of the liberal man to give to the right people than to receive from the right people...because virtue consists more in doing good than in receiving it...[I]t is not in the character of one who confers benefits to receive them readily.” (IV, I, 1120)

Moreover, in his discussion of magnanimity—translated also as greatness of soul, proper pride, self-respect—he provides the following description:

“[The magnanimous man] is disposed to confer benefits, but is ashamed to accept them, because the one is the act of a superior and the other that of an inferior. When he repays a service he does so with interest, because in this way the original benefactor will become his debtor and beneficiary. People of this kind are thought to remember the benefits that they have conferred, but not those that they have received (because the beneficiary is inferior to the benefactor, and the magnanimous man wants to be superior), and

to enjoy being reminded of the former, but not of the latter.” (IV, iii, 1124)

In these two sets of statements Aristotle quite unambiguously conveys his view that giving and receiving are to be viewed in terms of superiority and inferiority. Being put in the position of beneficiary is a matter of inferiority and shame and any self-respecting individual should be inclined to underestimate if not entirely overlook or deny the contributions made to their well-being by others.

In his *Lectures on Ethics* (1775-80), Kant characterized “noble-minded” and “right-thinking men” as having correctly understood that the “favours” and “kindnesses” offered by others are not to be accepted; indeed, if at all possible, they are to be strenuously refused. He stated that:

“Men are shamed by favours. If I receive a favour, I am placed under an obligation to the giver; he has a call upon me because I am indebted to him. We all blush to be obliged.” (1775-80/1963, 218)

On Kant’s view, the relationship between giver and recipient is construed in terms of a bond within the context of which the recipient involuntarily and reluctantly incurs an obligation which must be fulfilled, a debt which must be repaid. He maintained that even in the most benign of cases in which the giver assures that the gift is offered freely, with no expectation of repayment or obligation, “a favour is a debt that can never be extinguished.” The reason for this, according to Kant, is that the giving and receiving of a favour establishes an irreversible, hierarchic relationship between the giver and the recipient. The former has *forever* inserted himself into a position of precedence and seniority and the latter must *thereafter* occupy a subordinate position.

“For even if I repay my benefactor tenfold, I am still not even with him, because he has done me a kindness which he did not owe. He was the first in the field, and even if I return his gift tenfold I do so only as repayment. He will always be the one who was the first to show kindness and I can never be beforehand with him.” (1775-80/1963, 222)

“[O]ne cannot, by any repayment of a kindness received, *rid* oneself of the obligation for it, since the recipient can never win away from the benefactor his priority of merit, namely having been the first in benevolence.” (1797/1996, 203)

On Kant’s view, then, benevolent exchanges between human beings transpire within the larger, ongoing context of a covert race, of an implicit, yet keenly sensed and monitored, competition. The person who is unable to refuse a gift is obliged to adopt the loser’s position, a passive position requiring the duty of gratitude. The person who freely bestows the benefit enjoys, by virtue of the timing, the precedence, of his or her generous act, the role of the winner. For Kant, gratitude is essentially an oppressive duty, one that persons should do their utmost to elude and generosity, ironically, whether intended as such or not, invariably oppresses its beneficiary by locking him into an inescapable subordination. A reciprocal alternation of roles is conceptually impossible. The capacity for generosity is unrelated to the prior, valued experience of gratefully benefiting from the benevolence of others. Giving and receiving are inextricably associated with power and domination.

According to Aristotle and Kant, at least in the context of their remarks as quoted above, the reception of a benefit from others is to be avoided, as finding oneself in the position of beneficiary jeopardizes one’s pride which is founded upon one’s sense of self-sufficiency. Although Aristotle was prepared, as a result

of his wish to reserve a place for friendship in his conception of the good life, to allow for a special kind of dependence on those true friends who have been confirmed as the self's equal (Woodruff, 2002), his overall view appears to have been that to ask for help and to depend on others constitutes "servile conduct." (IV, iii, 1124) In a similar vein, Kant argued that even though human beings have a duty to be beneficent to others in need, they also have a duty to themselves to do away with or transcend their own need for others and "to bear the hardships of life" on their own. According to Kant, this latter duty, which is necessary in order to preserve "real self-esteem", stems from a wish to avoid incurring an obligation and thereby taking on the potentially humiliating, "inferior position of a dependent." (1797/1996, 206-7)

11 The Difficulty of Reception: Emerson and Nietzsche on Need and Dependency

“[T]o these virtues of giving must be added virtues of receiving...The exercise of these latter virtues always involves a truthful acknowledgment of dependence. And they are therefore virtues bound to be lacking in those whose forgetfulness of their dependence is expressed in an unwillingness to remember benefits conferred by others...We recognize here an illusion of self-sufficiency...” (MacIntyre, 1999)

“[T]here emerges the picture of the good recipient as one who, understanding the dynamics of the gift relation, can accept a gift from another without either resenting or being immobilized or threatened by the other’s generosity; who, while possibly aware of...recipient obligations...is spontaneously moved to a demonstration of sincerely felt gratitude toward the donor, to appropriate use of the gift itself, and to generosity to others; who, having experienced the goodness of gifts seeks himself to become a giver.” (Camenisch, 1981)

Does the recognition of the complexity of giving—which calls for awareness of the potential ambivalence of recipients—coupled with the recognition of the danger of reception—which identifies the risk that the position of beneficiary is degraded to the humiliating status of an inferior dependent—require the avoidance of situations in which others might wish or feel inclined to bestow goods upon us? Is it not possible to affirm the *difficulty* of reception without being compelled to adopt a view of the good life as the pursuit of maximal self-sufficiency?

Although many would reject the conclusions of Aristotle and Kant as extreme responses to the dangers of receiving benefits and would affirm that a life which excluded (if, indeed, this was a possibility) external goods, including the ongoing contributions of others, is an impoverished one, the discernment of what

constitute the difficulties of reception and the ways in which these difficulties may be surmounted may not be an easy task. For, while individuals in our culture tend to think about personal development and the good life in reference to a variety of dimensions, such as the achievement of independence or the capacity to care for others, it has not been the case, for the most part, that they commonly inquire about the challenges of being a recipient and the processes or practices whereby they may come to acknowledge their dependence upon others. Indeed, there is reason to believe that human beings may be disposed to avoid inquiries of this kind until they find themselves confronted with situations in which the refusal to acknowledge dependence threatens to undermine their capacity to flourish or to attend to the needs of others.

In the present section we will explore these questions by considering the contributions of Nietzsche and Emerson. These two writers are of interest to us in the present context because, while their views coincide with those of Aristotle and Kant with respect to the dangers of reception, they diverge from them in that they were not tempted to advocate that the good life is one that is maximally self-sufficient. Now, this claim may seem paradoxical as Nietzsche characterized his superman as a solitary creator and Emerson insisted upon the centrality of the virtue of self-reliance. Yet, in spite of, or in addition to, their recognition of the importance of independence in the good life, each was deeply aware of the need to cultivate what we have called here receptivity.

In his *Zarathustra*, while he identified “gift-giving” as the highest virtue, Nietzsche (1892/1995) indicated that the reception of gifts is fraught with danger

(see: Schrift, 1994; Shapiro, 1991, 1997). He claimed that “It is dangerous to be an heir” (1892/1995, 77) and that

“Having seen the sufferer suffer, I was ashamed for the sake of his shame; and when I helped him, I transgressed grievously against his pride. Great indebtedness does not make men grateful, but vengeful; and if a little charity is not forgotten, it turns into a gnawing worm. ‘Be reserved in accepting!’” (1892/1995, 89)

Similarly, Emerson, in his essay entitled “Gifts”, stated:

“The law of benefits is a difficult channel, which requires careful sailing, or rude boats. It is not the office of a man to receive gifts. How dare you give them? We wish to be self-sustained. We do not quite forgive a giver. The hand that feeds us is in some danger of being bitten...We sometimes hate the meat we eat, because there seems something of degrading dependence in living by it.” (1844/2000, 361)

These observations, however, did not lead these writers to recommend the shoring up of the boundaries of the self. Instead, they offered meditations on the poverty of those lives that are unable to sustain contact with others, to receive those benefits linked to interpersonal relationships. We will first take up Nietzsche’s comments in this regard.

Even though the image of the sun as a Platonic symbol of the self-sufficient giver of life looms large in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche (1982/1995) at different moments in his text appears to offer a critique of the ideal of self-sufficiency as an unrealizable fantasy. This critique takes aim at two targets, in each instance by revealing the neediness masked by the image of the subject as giver, as bestower of benefits on others who are in need.

First, at the very start of his work Nietzsche challenged the idea of the self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction of the sun itself: “You great star, what would

your happiness be had you not those for whom you shine?" (9) Here, Nietzsche suggested that it would be an illusion to regard human beings dichotomously as either givers *or* receivers, to suppose that the latter are the needy and thus poor ones, while the former occupy a position of perfect equanimity, a rich existence free of the tensions stemming from dependency. On his view, givers have a need for their receivers: "Behold, I am weary of my wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much honey; I need hands outstretched to receive it." (10) Similarly, in a chapter entitled "On The Great Longing", Nietzsche wrote: "Which of us has to be thankful? Should not the giver be thankful that the receiver received? Is not giving a need? Is not receiving mercy?" (223)

Nietzsche was not content simply to point out that givers depend on their recipients. He went on to expose the pain that may exist in those givers who idealize the position of the giver and pity or feel contempt for the supposed poverty of the receiver. In his chapter "The Night-Song", Nietzsche has Zarathustra relate the unhappiness of his existence despite his discovery that he is overflowing, that he has much to give to or squander upon others. Zarathustra states:

"But I live in my own light; I drink back into myself the flames that break out of me. I do not know the happiness of those who receive; and I have often dreamed that even stealing must be more blessed than receiving. This is my poverty, that my hand never rests from giving; this is my envy, that I see waiting eyes and the lit-up nights of longing. Oh, wretchedness of all givers! Oh, darkening of my sun! Oh, craving to crave! Oh, ravenous hunger in satiation!" (106)

Zarathustra laments that he is isolated from others, longing for loving contact but cold and callous and unable to feel the warmth offered by those who wish to give.

“Zarathustra...has become a stranger to his ability to be affected, touched, or moved by anything at all, including himself. Having lost that ability, it is inevitable that he should be barred from sensing the love of others and hence that he should be a stranger to the feel of that love...[Zarathustra] has disowned his *power of receptivity*.” (Gooding-Williams, 2001, 162-3, italics in original)

And he is consumed with envy, the giver’s envy of those who deeply enjoy that which they gladly take from others:

“A hunger grows out of my beauty: I should like to hurt those to whom I give; thus do I hunger for malice...My happiness in giving died in giving.” (106)

Now, although Nietzsche in “The Night-Song” did not provide an account of the genesis of Zarathustra’s painful state of mind—he did, though, in that chapter characterize relentless givers as possessing an “inexorable will”—in his chapter entitled “The Tomb-Song” there are clues in this connection. As may be guessed from its title, this chapter is about loss and grief. Specifically, Zarathustra links his present loneliness to the losses of his youth. Addressing those whom he has lost, he says “Verily, you have died too soon for me”, yet “I am still the heir of your love” (110). However, Zarathustra has become an heir who, in a sense, has chosen to disavow the dependence and vulnerability that is at the heart of receiving an inheritance.

“How did I endure it? How did I get over and overcome such wounds? How did my soul rise again out of such tombs? Indeed, in me there is something invulnerable and unburiable, something that explodes rock: *my will*. Silent and unchanged it strides through the years...its mind is hard of heart and invulnerable.” (112, italics in original)

Surely, there is a price to be paid for adopting a stance which entails such hardness of heart and invulnerability. One loses touch with one’s “power of

receptivity”, one’s capacity for gratitude; one keeps oneself from being open to the ways in which others may touch one and thereby contribute to and enrich one’s well-being. The difficulty of reception, then, may have something to do with the difficulty of acknowledging dependence on others, as such acknowledgment involves the sometimes painful awareness that our flourishing is contingent on aspects of our lives over which we have no control.

In a well-known passage early on in his essay on “Experience”, Emerson (1844/2000) wrote of the loss of his son and of his fear that his grief would leave him untouched, or perhaps, out of touch.

“Was it Boscovich who found out that bodies never come in contact? Well, souls never touch their objects. An innavigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we aim at and converse with...In the death of my son, now more than two years ago, I seem to have lost a beautiful estate,—no more. I cannot get it nearer to me...it does not touch me: some thing which I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me, nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me, and leaves no scar...I grieve that grief can teach me nothing.” (309)

And, furthermore, in a statement to which Nietzsche might have consented, he added:

“I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition.” (309)

Toward the end of this same essay, possibly as a response to the dilemmas articulated above, Emerson offered a critique of a certain way of conceiving of our relations with each other. Specifically, he challenged our belief that we are consciously aware of and know precisely how we are affected by others—what he called “overt effects”—and how we may affect them—by way of what he called

“direct strokes.” Instead, Emerson stated, “All I know is reception. I am and I have: but I do not get, and when I have fancied I had gotten anything, I found I did not.” (325) When we confuse reception, being touched by another, with possession, clutching and controlling that person who touches me, we risk losing touch altogether with something that enriches us and to which we attach great value.

We may now turn to Emerson’s conception of the gift. Unlike Kant, Emerson was not prepared to construe *all* gifts as dangerous to their recipients and proposed an account of what he took to be “true” gifts. On his view, “(t)he only gift is a portion of thyself” and “the rule for a gift...is that we might convey to some person that which properly belonged to his character.” (1844/2000, 361) A genuine gift, one that does not “invade” the “independence” of the recipient, is one that reflects the authentic desire of the giver to offer something of value. This would exclude utilitarian objects (for these constitute an affront to the person’s image of possessing all that is needed) but would include anything that embodies a quality that transcends the sphere of individual ownership, and here Emerson refers specifically to expressions of beauty and love. Moreover, Emerson characterized a true gift as one that springs from the giver’s discerning attention to what would respond to and connect with the particular “spirit” of the recipient.

An important feature of Emerson’s account relates to the role of the will in giving. At one point, he indicates that persons are not receptive to “any one who assumes to bestow” (361), implying that this assumption, or presumption, betrays a position of superiority, entailing the belief that the giver is imparting something

that the recipient's pursuit of self-sufficiency has overlooked. According to Emerson, genuine giving, together with the gratitude that follows as a response, more often occurs outside the realm of direct, conscious intention, that is, within the context of indirect, preconscious interaction.

“We can rarely strike a direct stroke, but must be content with an oblique one; we seldom have the satisfaction of yielding a direct benefit, which is directly received. But rectitude scatters favors on every side without knowing it, and receives with wonder the thanks of all people...When I have attempted to join myself to others by services, it proved an intellectual trick,--no more. They eat your service like apples, and leave you out. But love them, and they feel you, and delight in you all the time.” (1844/2000, 363)

In Emerson's view, in spite of the fact that individuals strive to sustain an image of proud independence (and resent suggestions to the contrary), the human condition is one of “universal dependence.” (361) While in the context of his essay on “Gifts” he does not explicate what he means by characterizing our condition in this way, his analysis of indirect giving and receiving offers a possible sense of what he had in mind. For Emerson, although human beings aim to regard themselves as self-sustaining, as masters of the resources required for survival, the ways in which they are indirectly receptive and responsive to one another constitute important sources of satisfaction and value. Generosity is not a deliberate act entailing the calculated expectation of a return, but a spontaneous “flowing of the giver”, the grateful response to which evokes a feeling of surprise on the part of the unassuming giver. Gratitude is not a duty, performed voluntarily or reluctantly, but a mode of recognition that feels no shame in acknowledging that one has been the recipient of the kindness of another. The fear of a degrading dependence that issues from, and perhaps gives rise to, the state of mind that

pursues self-sufficiency is replaced by an enlivening and enriching interdependence: “He is a good man who can receive a gift well.” (1844/2000, 362)

12 Harold Bloom on Belatedness and Generativity

“One repays a teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil.” (Nietzsche, 1892/1995)

“We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet’s difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors...[I]f we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity...[Tradition] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense [which] involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.” (Eliot, 1922/1975)

Although Harold Bloom’s literary theory was advanced initially in the context of his project of exploring the processes of poetic creation, a number of his key concepts are of considerable value in conceptualizing intergenerational relationships generally. Bloom insists that the subjectivity of human beings emerges and takes shape only insofar as they are situated in the context of a tradition and, in response to the question, “What happens if one tries to write, or to teach, or to think, or even to read without the sense of some tradition?,” he offers the following answer:

“Why, nothing at all happens, just nothing. You cannot write or teach or think or even read without imitation, and what you imitate is what another person has done, that person’s writing or teaching or thinking or reading. Your relation to what informs that person *is* tradition, for tradition is influence that extends past one generation, a carrying-over of influence.” (1975, 32)

Now, it is not this drawing of attention to the role of tradition in the acquisition of distinctively human capacities that makes Bloom’s work so interesting. His

contribution lies in his account of the manner in which individual and tradition come into contact, of the psychic impact of the individual's encounter with pre-existing cultural forms. Bloom goes on to ask the following further questions about tradition—"Do we choose a tradition or does it choose us, and why is it necessary that a choosing take place, or a being chosen?" (1975, 32)—and it is in his response to these questions that he has articulated his particular point of view. According to Bloom, there is reason to maintain that, ontogenetically, persons are 'chosen' by traditions before they come to consider and decide which traditions they wish to appropriate and consciously identify with. Moreover, insofar as Bloom views traditions as embodied in particular persons, he proceeds to analyze the transmission of tradition in terms of the relationships between individuals and those precursors who choose them, which is to say, those precursors who engage their attention and elicit their interest: "No strong writer (person) can choose his predecessors until first he is chosen by them and no strong student can fail to be chosen by his teachers." (1975, 39)

Bloom chooses to characterize the influence of tradition and the genesis of personal subjectivity specifically in terms of the relationship between teacher and student. On his view, this primordial, paradigmatic relationship between teacher and student, between "ephebe" and "precursor", is not to be construed as an essentially detached, intellectual exchange. Rather, this relationship, which Bloom refers to (after Freud's concept of the "primal scene") as being situated in the "Scene of Instruction", is originally emotionally charged, highly ambivalent and infused with intensely fantastic, imaginative features.

“If we are human, then we depend upon a Scene of Instruction, which is necessarily also a scene of authority and of priority.” (1975, 38)

The Scene of Instruction is one in which the student feels subjected to (feels him or her self to be the object of) the asymmetrical influence of the teacher and experiences this influence as entailing contradictory qualities. On the one hand, the ephebe feels loved and awakened by the precursor, but, on the other hand, the intense power of this love is felt to violently ravage the ephebe who, by comparison, feels him or her self to be immensely wanting and vulnerable. Bloom, using a vocabulary that is reminiscent of the one employed by Nietzsche, states:

“[T]here is this unequal love, where necessarily the giving famishes the receiver. The receiver is set on fire, and yet the fire belongs only to the giver.” (1975, 51)

“[T]he poet is condemned to learn his profoundest yearnings through an awareness of other selves. The poem is within him, yet he experiences the shame and splendor of being found by poems outside him. To lose freedom in this center is never to forgive, and to learn the dread of threatened autonomy forever.” (1973, 26)

Bloom, then, uses this notion of the Scene of Instruction to convey his view that the self is called forth or found, in the context of a relationship with a figure of authority who is discovered as having an existence which temporally precedes that of the self. He argues that this originary Scene forcefully structures the psyche of the nascent person specifically in terms of the powerful influence of a precursor, a precursor who is felt to be even more present, more substantial than the very self of the ephebe. Bloom even offers a term for the conceptualization of the psyche so structured, a “Psychology of Belatedness.” On his view, a

Psychology of Belatedness conceives the psyche as haunted by the “anxiety of influence” (of inheritance, of indebtedness) and as driven to resist and oppose the violent impact of his encounters with those who have come before and who have the power to bring forth the self’s innermost dispositions.

“A poet is not so much a man speaking to men as a man rebelling against being spoken to by a dead man (the precursor) outrageously more alive than himself.” (1975, 19)

“The voice of the other, of the daimon, is always speaking in one; the voice that cannot die because it has already survived death.” (1975, 19)

Having posited this inevitable, primordial Scene of Instruction, and the Psychology of Belatedness it originates, how does Bloom envisage the options available to the student who is every person in formation? According to Bloom, the Scene of Instruction may undergo a developmental transformation from its very primitive initial crystallization to articulations which permit a greater measure of liberty and hope. In his view, much depends upon the readiness of the student “to wrestle with the internalized violence pressed upon them by their teachers and precursors.” (1975, 39) Each person “must take on his share of the poet’s agon, so that (he) may make of his own belatedness a strength rather than an affliction.” (1975, 80) The matter seems to rest upon the individual’s capacity to accept his or her belatedness rather than to deny it outright and thereby “lie-against-time”:

“If you will not have one instructor or another, then precisely by rejecting all instructors, you will condemn yourself to the earliest Scene of Instruction that imposed itself upon you...; reject your parents vehemently enough, and you will become a belated version of them, but compound with their reality, and you may partly free yourself.” (1975, 38)

The possibility of relative emancipation from the earliest and most paralyzing Scene of Instruction, then, is linked to the person's capacity to accept an instructor. The person must come to allow that he or she can (only) learn from another and this, in turn, depends upon recognizing that one can (indeed, must) accept to live in time, that others who have arrived on the scene before one have not exhausted all that there is to do in the ongoing project of understanding and of giving.

According to Bloom, anxiety in relation to the influence of the precursor needs to be read dialectically. That is to say, the student's experience and imaginative articulation of the teacher's powerful impact is to be seen as a reflection of the student's own primitive conception of how he or she might relate to others. Specifically, the apprehension of the precursor in the earliest Scene of Instruction is a function of the student's own ambitions regarding (the avoidance of) influence: "For the anxiety of influence stems from the ephebe's assertion of an eternal, divinating consciousness." (1975, 75) Such a consciousness, it would seem, is one that takes itself as existing outside of time, outside of the intergenerational dynamic matrix that is the source of personhood. Moreover, it is "divinating" in the sense that it is self-creating, rather than created or shaped by factors outside the control of the self. In this way, the person embraces the fantasy that it is possible to escape influence and indebtedness and that the good life does not entail reception and, therefore, gratitude.

Just as the adequacy of Harold Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence has been called into question as a general account of poetic creation, so one might

wonder about whether his theory could possibly constitute a normative account of developmental processes. Is the intense and even violent ambivalence that Bloom attributes to the individual in relation to his or her enlivening predecessor a necessary and inescapable aspect of the phenomenology of intergenerational reception and inspiration? While Bloom's account may not constitute a universal pattern in the emergence and shaping of personal subjectivity, I believe that his rich vocabulary illuminates and gives meaning to certain features of those lives distinguished by an ongoing openness to others and in which, as a result of such openness, the cultivation of gratitude becomes a dominant concern.

13 Annette Baier on “Second Persons”

“The question now becomes: into which category do all those activities fall which aim at the reproduction of relations between persons over time? I here include such activities as feeding, playing with, or caring for infants and children, but also the more general and iterative encouragement and attention to the development of their emotional, moral and intellectual capacities...Nor do I see any reason to limit the object of this form of reproductive *praxis* to infants and children; *all* persons, including the aged and those in their prime, need such activities of freely-given attention and care if their lives are to flourish. Once again, I am only stressing the difference between the biological process that ‘reproduces’ a human offspring...from that highly conscious, rational activity that aims at reproducing *persons*.” (Schwarzenbach, 1992, 250)

In a number of philosophical papers published over the last twenty or so years, Annette Baier has advanced what she refers to as a “naturalist view of persons”. Such a view insists upon the fundamental interdependence of human beings (a fact Baier has recently alluded to with the phrase “the commons of the mind”) and aims to provide an account of the genesis of mature personhood as an intrinsically social and, in critical respects, intergenerational process. In Baier’s view, “persons are the creation of persons” (1985, 86), “persons essentially are *second* persons” (1985, 84). She spells this perspective out in the following ways:

“A person, perhaps, is best seen as one who was long enough dependent upon other persons to acquire the essential arts of personhood...Persons are essentially successors, heirs to other persons who formed and cared for them.” (1985, 84-5)

“Persons are born to earlier persons, and learn the arts of personhood from other persons...Our personhood is responsive, called into full expression by other persons who treat us as one of them.” (1994, 313)

“[E]ach person has a childhood in which a cultural heritage is transmitted, ready for adolescent rejection and adult discriminating selection and contribution.” (1985, 85)

According to Baier, while such an account of the interpersonal origins of selfhood may be widely affirmed, there is a tendency to deny that such origins ultimately are of relevance in conceptualizing the cognitive processes and moral responses of adults. There is a tendency to posit a radical discontinuity between the dependent, receptive, responsive character of experience in childhood and what is taken to be the self-sufficiency and autonomy of adulthood.

“Why, it will be asked, must we keep the memory of our incompetent dependent infancy, and of our dependence on a pair of parents for our very existence? Can we not, like Descartes, simply deny that we depend on them, or any past helpers, for what matters now, our adult capacities for thought and intentional action?” (1997, 29)

In Baier’s view, this wish to reject and to transcend (and the belief in the possibility of rejecting and transcending) the intergenerational dependence of our early years overlooks a number of important considerations.

First, the emotional lives and personalities of human beings are essentially ongoing responses to dependency, to the ways in which individuals recognize, or avoid the recognition of, their own intersubjective genesis.

“Not only does each earlier phase causally influence each later phase...but in persons each later phase is a *response* to earlier phases, caused not only by them but by some sort of partial representation of them and their historical and causal relationships.” (1985, 85)

Second, the adult work of discerning what features of one’s interpersonal and cultural inheritance are worth retaining and how one might creatively add to that which one has received does not end: “The genesis of competent adults is an

ongoing matter.” (1997, 30) Third, interdependence—in the form of mutual dependency and trust—is a more fundamental feature of experience, and especially of optimal experience, in adulthood than is typically acknowledged:

“[W]e have little real choice about depending on *some* social infrastructure...One might say that we trust that normal generative activity will continue, if trust includes unselfconscious reliance on others continuing to do what we have come to count on their doing. It is against this background of familiar ongoing services that other more self-conscious sorts of trust grow.” (1997, 30-32)

While Baier emphasizes the constitutive role of interpersonal relations in the formation of personhood, the position that she has been developing does not have the relativistic orientation that characterizes some social constructionist accounts. In her view, “cultures present individuals with better and worse versions of the basic human passions, available for their cultivation” (1997, 45) and better and worse views of how these passions ought to be cultivated. As an example of this, Baier refers to Hume’s discussion of the difference between cultures that promote or tolerate revenge as an appropriate response to harm or injustice and those that encourage the control of retaliatory desires and articulate the possibility and value of forgiveness. In this vein, acknowledging that theoretical formulations represent part of a particular culture’s body of expression and, more specifically, that Baier’s own naturalist view of persons is offered at least implicitly with the aim of becoming an aspect of its culture’s legacy, it is interesting to note how Baier characterizes the implications of her position:

“A social view of reason does not doom one to undervaluing independent thinking, nor to overvaluing deference to the thought-community in which one grew up. But it does incline one to a *proper gratitude* to those who taught one all the miscellaneous arts of reasoning...Indeed, one can be grateful even to those who

indoctrinated one in the views one later comes to reject. One good stimulus to independent critical thinking is an offensive demand for conformity.” (1997, 14, emphasis added)

It seems, then, that for Baier “the basic human passions” are to be conceived within the context of a broader view of human nature, one which recognizes the inevitability of the intersubjective, interdependent genesis of person formation. Moreover, such a conception of human nature establishes the significance of the intergenerational links between persons and their predecessors and suggests that at least one aspect of the cultivation of the passions entails the clarification of an appropriate sense of gratitude to those who have contributed to one’s self-definition and self-understanding.

14 The Labor of Gratitude: Interdependence, Equality and Self-worth

“When I receive a new gift, I do not macerate my body to make the account square...The benefit overran the merit the first day, and has overran the merit ever since. The merit itself, so-called, I reckon part of the receiving.” (Emerson, “Experience”, 1844/2000)

“[A] transformative gift cannot be fully received when it is first offered because the person does not yet have the power either to accept the gift or to pass it along...The labor of gratitude is the middle term in the passage of a gift...A gift that has the power to change us awakens a part of the soul. But we cannot receive the gift until we can meet it as an equal. We therefore submit ourselves to the labor of becoming like the gift[,]...becom[ing] sufficiently empowered to hold and to give the gift.” (Hyde, 1983)

At the heart of the perspective I am aiming to articulate in this thesis is the idea of “the labor of gratitude,” introduced by Lewis Hyde (1983) in his book *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*. A “lively culture”, according to Hyde, promotes the spiritual development of its members by making widely available and transmitting to them “agents of change” which he calls “transformative gifts.” When these gifts, among which Hyde includes “teachings”, are initially accepted and welcomed by individuals, they are felt to offer a glimpse of a richer conception of the good life and to inspire a sense of new possibilities. Yet, Hyde insists, the *full reception* of these gifts, the maximal realization of their transformative potential, is contingent upon the recipient undergoing a process he designates as “the labor of gratitude.” On his view, a transformative gift cannot be fully received at the moment it is bestowed since the recipient is not yet able to feel that he or she possesses the “power” either to “hold” the gift or to pass it along to another. In a sense, it may be said that the

gift, by virtue of the radical novelty of the future it envisions, is felt at first to entail a capacity or dynamism never before encountered and which seems to be beyond the horizon of the recipient. By way of the labor of gratitude, the course of which is dictated by its own “interior rhythms” and not by societal expectations, the individual gradually comes to feel that he or she has ascended to “the level of the gift,” experiences a “similarity” with the gift and its donor, meets the gift “as an equal.” Furthermore, the recipient comes to feel empowered in a new way, to discover or articulate a new sense of worth linked to the capacity to contain and convey something viewed as embodying great value—that is, a gift.

A central feature of Lewis Hyde’s account is that the “labor of gratitude” is a process that the recipient *agrees* to undergo. According to Hyde, the recipient allows him or herself to “suffer” or “submit to” the labor and this acceptance of suffering or submission is manifested in part in the refusal to respond to the gift by trying to cancel or discharge the feeling of indebtedness with the production of a return gift: “Gratitude requires an *unpaid* debt, and will be motivated to proceed only so long as the debt is *felt*.” (Hyde, 1983, 51) That is, the labor of gratitude entails not only tolerating but actively sustaining a state of tension in which the promise conveyed by the gift co-exists alongside the wish to eliminate the sense of indebtedness. When the process is undergone, the appeal and pull of the envisioned enrichment permit the recipient to bear the painful contrast between him or herself and his or her benefactor, the gap between the construed worth of the present self and the value attached to a possible future. The refusal of the

process, Hyde suggests, is what is called “narcissism”, that state of mind in which the individual views the self as the source of all gifts and value.

Hyde’s account constitutes an important contribution in several respects. First, he proposes not only that gratitude must be considered from a developmental point of view, that is as a complex response to be understood in reference to its genealogy, but also that the very possibility of development, of the spiritual transformation of the individual, is a function of the capacity for gratitude. In connection with the former, Hyde underscores the challenge and the importance of coming to *sustain* the sense of indebtedness that follows upon the initial reception of a gift and, simultaneously, of coming to *renounce* the narcissistic pursuit of self-sufficiency. With respect to the latter, he suggests that the development of the individual needs to be viewed at least to some extent in relational terms, as inspired and nourished dialogically from without and not as unfolding organically from within, and that, consequently, spiritual transformation is, in a sense, *driven* by the grateful reception of gifts bestowed by others.

Second, Hyde’s notion of the labor of gratitude as comprising a process whereby the individual comes to feel *equal* to the gift and, as a result, experiences a new sense of power and worth is rich and suggestive. Hyde proposes that the reception of a transformative gift constitutes a (welcomed, though) destabilizing event which evokes in the recipient a sense of inferiority and inadequacy. This (acceptable) experience of inequality is linked, it appears, to the challenge posed by the gift to the narcissistic character of the individual’s pre-existing, habitual

mode of being. That is, the gift obliges the recipient to acknowledge his or her incompleteness and indebtedness to others and to affirm, more generally, the value of the gift's vision of the good life as shaped in large measure by the interdependence of persons. Hyde suggests that the capacity to fully receive something of value from another, to deeply allow that another is in a position to offer something that enhances one's own well-being, is contingent upon the capacity of the recipient to articulate a new sense of self-worth, a sense of intrinsic worth based upon a sense of the self as being able to participate in an interdependent relationship in which one also has the power to give something of value to others. The capacity to receive gratefully is dialectically linked to confidence in the capacity to give. Developmental advance to a new mode of being (or, of being-in-relation) which affords a deeper and more abiding sense of value is a function of the capacity to acknowledge dependence, that is, of the capacity to undergo the labor of gratitude.

Before bringing this section to a close, it is important to indicate that, although (following Hyde) we have referred to the idea of *full reception*, this should not be taken as suggesting that the labor of gratitude is a process undergone by individuals once and for all time at some decisive turning point in their life course. While we have spoken of developmental advance to a new sense of intrinsic self-worth, this is not meant to imply or entail the view that this personal transformation is to be viewed as a linear, stage-like process whereby an older mode of being is somehow irreversibly surpassed and replaced by a newer one. Instead, it seems more appropriate to regard the labor of gratitude as an open-

ended and spiraling process, as a form of ongoing developmental work that may, under optimal conditions, recur in multiple contexts at multiple moments in time. The acknowledgment of dependence and the participation in interdependent relationships are not fixed goals which are ever finally and comprehensively achieved. Rather, they remain unavoidably contingent upon internal and external factors not wholly within the control of individuals and are, therefore, vulnerable to reversals or setbacks. Moreover, so long as human beings remain receptive to being inspired by new possibilities and accept that their capacity to give to others is forever open to development, they will find themselves welcoming the destabilization and sense of inequality that comes with the reception of new gifts and will be prepared to undergo once again that labor of gratitude which will drive the shift toward an ever richer and more confident sense of themselves as responsible, generative persons.

15 Adulthood and Intergenerational Relations

“Thus you wounded my virtue in its faith. And whenever I laid down for a sacrifice even what was holiest to me, your ‘piety’ immediately placed its fatter gifts alongside, and in the fumes of your fat what was holiest to me suffocated.” (Nietzsche, 1892/1995)

“Only when we give first are we free, and this is the reason why, in the first gift, which is not occasioned by any gratitude, there lies a beauty, a spontaneous devotion to the other, an opening up and flowering from the ‘virgin soil’ of the soul, as it were, which cannot be matched by any subsequent gift, no matter how superior its content. The difference involved here finds expression in the feeling...that we *cannot* return a gift; for it has a freedom which the return gift, because it is *that*, cannot possibly possess.” (Simmel, 1908/1996)

In the foregoing sections, the idea that gift and gratitude (along with giver and recipient) are linked by a relation of *temporality* has emerged on different occasions. Insofar as it was affirmed that grateful subjectivity is a response to the reception of a good bestowed freely by another, it is evident that gratitude is understood to have been *preceded* by a gift. In addition, it was noted that Kant viewed the giver of a gift as having forever inserted himself into a (superior) position of *precedence* and *seniority* relative to his recipient and that the latter thereafter was obliged to occupy a *secondary, derivative* (and inferior) position. This view, it appears, was shared by Simmel who, in the passage quoted above, offered a rather idealized conception of an original, radically free, *first* gift which no *subsequent* return gift motivated by gratitude could ever “match” or, to use Hyde’s vocabulary, “equal.”

While I would maintain that Kant and Simmel have misconstrued both the significance and the irrevocability of the priority and seniority of the giver vis-a-vis the recipient, this aspect of the temporality of the relationship merits exploration from a *developmental, life-course* point of view (see Cohler & deBoer, 1996 for a valuable discussion of distinctions between epigenetic, life-span or life-cycle and life-course perspectives). Specifically, while there is no reason to assume that givers and receivers inevitably become locked into relations of precedence and seniority, it is the case that *ontogenetically* human beings are, at the inception of their lives, predominantly, even radically, in the position of recipients relative to givers who have preceded them historically and who are their seniors both generationally and, correlatively, with respect to life experience and maturity. Now, even though it has increasingly been argued that infants are considerably more active and competent cognitively than was once believed, it seems undeniable that, biologically and psychologically, the early years of life are characterized by extreme dependence on the attentive care provided by adults, typically parents. While we have grown accustomed to conceiving of one of the principal lines of development as entailing a move from dependence to independence, it is fruitful to posit an ideal transition from a position wherein the person is *predominantly* a recipient of goods to a position in which he or she, in addition to being a recipient, also becomes able to contribute to the well-being of others. Stated differently, an important, and relatively unexamined, aspect of optimal development concerns the ways in which individuals may and, indeed, often do come to acknowledge and appropriate their status as recipients, as

primordially dependent on the good will and gifts of caregivers belonging to a preceding generation, and the ways in which individuals may come to feel grateful for what they have received and confident about their own capacity to bestow gifts in turn.

It will be recalled that, in the section entitled “Gratitude and the Good Life”, it was stated that the focus here is on the emergence of *grateful subjectivity*. That is, while it may be the case that gratitude surfaces from early on in life as a relatively transitory feature of daily interpersonal exchanges, the interest in this thesis is on the advent of gratitude as a relatively deeply felt and abiding subjective disposition. On the basis of our discussion here, it is posited that grateful subjectivity requires participation in relationships characterized by ethical attention and the bestowal of gifts, as we have defined these above. These relationships would be ones in which the interdependence of human beings is acknowledged, the dangers and difficulties of reception have been discerned and appreciated and the individual is understood as having to proceed in his or her own time with the labor of gratitude.

Returning to the developmental, life-course perspective mentioned above, the more specific thesis I wish to advance is that the emergence of grateful subjectivity is, in great measure, a feature of transformations which, under certain circumstances, characterize the shift out of adolescence and the movement into adulthood. Of course, this returns us to some of the issues taken up earlier. The perspective adopted here emphasizes that the generative assumption of responsibilities and cultivation of care about the future that, from an Eriksonian

point of view, optimally characterize the passage to and through adulthood may be viewed in reference to the individual's progressive recognition and appreciation of intergenerational relationships. Specifically, it is maintained that, as individuals develop a sense of concern for others (both younger and older) and for the shape and direction of their own finite life course, they come to understand themselves, in a way that goes well beyond their earlier conceptions, as being situated in time and, especially, in a sequence of generations, some of which have preceded their own and others that are yet to come. This new historical consciousness of one's intergenerational position entails and encourages the concrete acknowledgment of interpersonal interdependence. Moreover, the adult individual's generative capacity to care for others and to promote their flourishing is dialectically linked to the capacity to feel grateful for the gifts bestowed upon him or her in the context of his or her life history. One learns how to discern and attend to the needs of other individuals only insofar as one recognizes that one's own well-being is and has been dependent on the care and contributions of others. More specifically, we have suggested that generativity hinges upon the individual's willingness and capacity to tolerate that painful sense of inequality—the anxiety of influence—associated with accepting that he or she is and has been the *recipient* of gifts bestowed by others and to submit to that process referred to as the labor of gratitude. As a result of the labor of gratitude, the individual, dialectically, comes to acknowledge the value of contributions to his or her own well-being from sources beyond the self's control and to articulate a new sense of

worth based upon a growing view of the self as being able to contribute value to the lives of others.

16 On the ‘Religious’ Structure of Human Experience

“Here things are astir with some element of chance beyond our best-laid plans, some future that we cannot see, something that by withdrawing from sight nonetheless draws us out of ourselves and draws us on, something for which we pray and weep...The religious sense of life has to do with exposing oneself to the radical uncertainty and the open-endedness of life...”(Caputo, 2001)

“I am driven by love to understand what I love when I love my God. I am at the very least in love with love...in the sense that I am beset by love, overtaken by love, drawn out of myself by love. I understand that the whole idea of a self rests in this dedication, this gift of myself, to something beyond my own self-love—to the children, all the children, not just my own, to the future, to the least among us.” (Caputo, 2001)

“[T]he various religious forms of life arise in *response* to something that has swept us away, something impossible, something other or wholly other to which we are responding...But human beings are responsible for all the particulars of the response.” (Caputo, 2001)

An inquiry into the significance of gift and gratitude in human life would be incomplete in an important sense if it did not at the very least acknowledge the fact that these large and fundamental themes have been most extensively articulated within the context of the great religious traditions. Each of these traditions has provided an account of human existence in which individual lives are construed in relation to a transcendent dimension and are situated as moments in a grand narrative that takes as its point of departure the creation of the world at the beginning of time. By regarding individual lives in this way, religious accounts undermine, or at least destabilize, any temptation to view ourselves as self-creating or self-sufficient and affirm that our experience and well-being are contingent matters and that we are dependent upon factors external to ourselves

and ultimately beyond our control. Moreover, our great traditions advise us that the goodness of our lives, in the dialectical sense discussed above, is a function of the ways in which we receive and respond to that which is taken as transcendent and that which is viewed as temporally extending beyond the span of our individual lives.

Now, having offered this general statement, I will say that the great religions differ with respect to the individual ways they envision the issues to which we have referred. While they share an orientation toward the transcendent and emphasize the importance of regarding human lives in reference to how these lives relate to (or, following Caputo, *respond* to) the transcendent, they differ in the conceptualization of the character of this relationship and of the nature of the transcendent itself. It appears to me that the notions of gift and gratitude, along with the idea that grateful subjectivity emerges in the context of conflict and as a result of considerable labor, are of particular interest to, and are given special attention in, *biblical thought*. There are likely many reasons for this, of which I will suggest two here. First, biblical thought takes as its basic claim that human beings are creatures, created by a personal God who has acted, and acts, out of love, freely given. Second, human beings are regarded as having, and as always having had, considerable difficulty accepting their creatureliness and as preferring to view themselves as possessing (within themselves) full control over the factors that relate to their well-being. According to biblical thought, as a result of the latter, human beings are viewed as avoiding and thus obscuring the reality of the former. They resist the acknowledgment of God's gifts and, in doing so, conduct

their lives, mistakenly, as if they are able to flourish without sustaining (their awareness of) their relation to God. Only by turning away from such a posture of self-sufficiency, by opening themselves to the fact of their ineluctable status as recipients of divine love, will they be in a position to realize the possibility of the good life for human beings. While it is beyond the scope of this work to discuss this in detail, I would like to bring this thesis to a close by suggesting certain lines of thought and referring to the contributions of certain individuals writing in the Jewish tradition.

“When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery...Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.”” (Deuteronomy 8)

“[E]very one of the virtues is a holy thing, but most especially is gratitude holy...There is an old story, conceived by the sages and handed down from age to age, that when God had finished the world, He asked one of the angels if aught were wanting on land or on sea, in air or in heaven. The angel replied that all was perfect; one thing only was lacking--speech, to praise God's works. And the heavenly Father approved the angel's words, and soon thereafter He created man, gifted with the muses. This is the ancient story, and in consonance with its spirit, I say: 'It is God's work to benefit man, and man's work to give Him thanks.'” (Philo of Alexandria, Plant. 129-130, as quoted in Silverman, 1950)

In keeping with the fact that this thesis has been concerned with development in adulthood, it is appropriate here to note that Emmanuel Levinas (1990) has characterized Judaism as “a religion for adults” and Arnold Eisen (1998) has described the fifth book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, as providing “a theory of adult vocation.” For Levinas, the genuine “possession of the Promised

Land,” a possession which is a reception and not a usurpation, rests upon the recognition of our “creaturely dependence.” According to Eisen, Deuteronomy proposes that adulthood is a vocation concerned essentially with the education of the next generation and the transmission to them of the valuable teachings we ourselves have received.

Now, it seems to me that any discussion of Jewish thought as it relates to gift and gratitude needs to address the themes of covenant and memory. The children of Israel, we are told in the Hebrew Bible, were elected, on a purely gratuitous and unmerited basis, to live consciously in dialogue with God, in a covenantal relationship which would ensure for them and their descendants, from generation to generation, access to the good life. Yet, in spite of this awareness of having been chosen out of love, the Israelites felt inadequate to receive and live with this offer and this challenge. They felt burdened by the gift of the covenant and forgot (failed to keep in mind) that their very existence was grounded in the relationship with God. In a certain sense, the narrative we are presented with in the Bible relates the story (the history) of how this people avoided the reception of their election and failed to remember that they were creatures who existed in dialogue with God. Moreover, the story provides an account of their education and the development of their capacity to love. They are confronted with the criticism that their forgetfulness is nothing less than ingratitude and a manifestation of their desire to efface the difference between creator and creature and they are enjoined, in fact commanded, to remember the way in which they stand in relation to God and, accordingly, to love him and gratefully acknowledge

his gifts (Fishbane, 1989; Greenberg, 2000; Newman, 1998; Novak, 1995; Wyschogrod, 1983). Harold Fisch (1971) and Yosef Yerushalmi (1982) have articulated these themes of memory and covenant in ways that are particularly relevant in the present context, concerned as we have been with the linked questions of temporality and generativity:

“Man could not forget were it not that he is subject to time and mutability: he could not remember were it not that he was linked by covenant to that which stands from the beginning of time and endures until the world is no more. By memory we are held firm in that context of reality which stretches from Adam to doomsday, but in between there is a time of forgetting.” (Fisch, 1971, 152)

“When we say that a people ‘remembers’ we are really saying that a past has been actively transmitted to the present generation and that this past has been accepted as meaningful. Conversely, a people ‘forgets’ when the generation that now possesses the past does not convey it to the next, or when the latter rejects what it receives and does not pass it onward, which is to say the same thing...What we call “forgetting” in a collective sense occurs when human groups fail—whether purposely or passively, out of rebellion, indifference, or indolence, or as a result of some disruptive historical tragedy—to transmit what they know out of the past to their posterity...The Jews were not mnemonic virtuosos. They were, however, willing receivers and superb transmitters.” (Yerushalmi, 1982, 109-10)

In her fine book entitled *The Particulars of Rapture*, Avivah Zornberg interprets the Exodus story by considering ancient rabbinic commentary in relation to contemporary psychoanalytic thought. Of special pertinence here is her discussion regarding the significance of how the Israelites responded to the giving of the Torah at Sinai and how they were only able to genuinely, that is unambivalently, receive this gift after forty years of desert wandering, just as they were about to cross the river and enter the Promised Land. She notes that the people who left Egypt were “unfit for redemption, incapable of hearing God’s

word in any real fullness” (2001, 11) and that at Sinai they were so overcome with terror in response to the revelation that they could not acknowledge with gratitude the meaning of the events they had witnessed. Zornberg quotes that portion of the Tosefot commentary which relates that Moses was disappointed with his people “because they did not want to be grateful to Him (lit. to recognize His goodness).” (2001, 282) She goes on to interpret this comment as implying “a willful repudiation of goodness, an intolerance of a relationship in which goodness has been bestowed” and she adds that “the receiving of goodness is, in some real sense, unbearable to them.” (2001, 282)

According to Zornberg, the people had to radically refuse the gift and the acknowledgment of God’s goodness because love was “tragically missing.” She refers to Rashi’s comment that the people were “not anxious to come close to Him in love” (2001, 283) and that forty years of wandering (and suffering) were required for a capacity to love, and to accept love, to develop. Zornberg indicates that the great Torah commentators attached enormous significance to Moses’ ultimate praise of the people, offered *after* the long trials in the desert and as they were (without him) about to enter the land they had been promised: “God has not given you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear, till this very day.” (Deuteronomy 29:3) She quotes Rashi who claimed that, because of this emerging openness, these newfound modalities for encounter and relationship, the people were now able, at long last, “to recognize the loving acts of God and to cling lovingly to and desire Him.” (2001, 284) Moreover, Zornberg in this context also quotes the following statement from the Talmud (Avodah Zara 5a,b) which

interprets these same words of praise quoted above from Deuteronomy (29:3): “Rava said: ‘We learn from this that a student comes to understand his teacher (his teacher’s mind) only after forty years’.” (2001, 282) Perhaps Rava was, in this passage preserved by the rabbis, formulating both the Bloomian insight concerning the challenge imposed upon human beings by the primitive Scene of Instruction and the proposal we have been advancing in this thesis that individuals optimally come to consolidate a more enduring posture of gratitude as they engage in the developmental work of adulthood in relation to the concern over generativity.

“Much religious mentality is devoted to a calculation of debts. It is a very human thing to keep score, and it is even more human to despair under the weight of the goodness of another, fearing that the debt will be too great ever to be paid in full. The thought of a God to whom we owe our very lives, and in whose sight we are always having to be made right, is often too much to bear. But if there is any good news, then the good news is that we owe God nothing, that God’s (is) a gift that is really free, and that in this gift, giving, which is strictly impossible, stirs in us as desire. We will never know whether God gives, or what God gives; we can only believe, struggling with traces and with words half said and needing to be unsaid, that there (is) gift.” (Horner, 2001, 247)

17 Conclusion

“The relation between God and the goods enjoyed by created beings is conceived of [by Augustine] as a relation between an utterly gratuitous giver and a recipient. Augustine could not have seized upon a more difficult and ambivalent relationship. The acknowledgment of dependence, and with it, the capacity to be grateful, does not come easily, in Augustine’s opinion; and he will unravel the origin and relationship of the two ‘cities’ in terms of this basic relationship of giver and recipient...[A]bove all there is pride: an omnipotent denial of dependence characterizes the attitude of the ‘earthly city’...Throughout *The City of God*, it is to this basic denial of dependence, and so of gratitude, that Augustine will point, in politics, in thought, in religion.” (Brown, 2000)

In this thesis I have attempted to provide an account of what I have come to regard as a critical feature of the psychic work of adulthood. In a certain sense, I have tried to explore and amplify Erik Erikson’s important contributions concerning the centrality of generativity in adult development by linking his views with Lewis Hyde’s conceptualization of gratitude as a labor to which individuals may or may not consent to submit. My position here has been that gratitude is, genealogically, a complex state of mind and mode of being which entails an acknowledgment of the importance of the dimensions of temporality and interpersonal dependence in human existence.

Early in this study I chose to bring into play the work of Stanley Cavell who, with great precision, has elucidated the nature and significance of the psychic movement or gesture of acknowledgment. Cavell has shown that in order to understand what is involved in acknowledging an aspect of reality one has to posit the dynamic presence of a preceding moment characterized by a failure to acknowledge, by a refusal or an avoidance, by an investment in a deforming and

devaluing illusion which overrides accurate intuitions of how we are actually situated in relation to the world, to others and to our evolving lives.

We have seen how, on this basis, Cavell argued that acknowledgment, and thereby maturity in adulthood, requires the capacity to mourn, to accept the untenability, and so the loss, of a conception of the self to which we have been deeply attached. Moreover, we noted that, according to Cavell, we do not ascend to and consolidate this capacity in a single defining moment, a moment which somehow establishes a radical discontinuity between the past and the present: “Learning mourning may be the achievement of a lifetime” (1987, 172). Similarly, although we read in Augustine’s *Confessions* (it is of some interest to note that “confessiones” means “acknowledgment”) that he underwent his conversion at a particular moment in his thirty-second year, we are also advised that this transformation in the garden hardly constituted the end of his struggle to find his way to God:

“Augustine does not romanticize sin, because he never gives his converted self the opportunity to eulogize his past. Sin carries into his conversion as self-alienation, the internal division that grace heals over the course of a lifetime’s labor in love. In this life, conversion is always unfinished business.” (Wetzel, 1992, 214)

Insofar as gratitude entails the *acknowledgment* of one’s temporality and of one’s dependence on the generosity and generativity of others, then we must recognize that the labor of gratitude involves the work of mourning (Freud, 1915, 1917; Klein, 1940, 1957). Specifically, as we come to appreciate the gifts we have received and continue to receive, and as we come to embrace the view that the value of our living is deeply contingent upon what we allow ourselves to accept

and to give, we discover that we are simultaneously engaged in surrendering those illusions of self-sufficiency that we have imagined, and hoped, would secure our flourishing.

“The gift begins when the potential giver suspects that another gift has already preceded him, to which he owes something, to which he owes himself to respond. Not only does the gift reside in the decision to give, accepted by the potential giver, but the giver can only decide inasmuch as he recognizes that another gift has already obliged him...To decide to receive a gift imposes the acceptance, with this gift, of the owing of something to someone...To decide to receive the gift is equivalent to deciding to become obligated by the gift...The gift, by its own allure and prestige, decides the giver to decide himself for it—that is to say, decides (or determines) him to sacrifice his own autocracy, the autocrat of what is his own, in order to receive it.” (Marion, 1999)

18 References

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