

Common Sense of Gratefulness

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In this paper I introduce a common sense model of gratefulness to support situations like slavery.

My whole life I believed that people did good in return for good things done to them. However, after learning a bit about the history of slavery, I have come to the conclusion that this must be wrong:

- A slave sacrifices everything and gives everything all the time
- A slave is treated as property, as some thing without dignity

This contradicts the whole principle of gratefulness. Consider the enormous amount of evidence of slavery during history, and correspondingly lack of gratefulness, one does not need a better counter-example showing there is something wrong about the assumption that people do good in return.

For example, a slave that worked hard his or hers entire life, can suddenly one day be tortured to death or left invalid to beg for food on the streets. During the entire existence of slavery, I can not imagine people associating gratefulness with the people used as slaves. Despite the slaves doing all the work, building the country etc. The honor of a nation is associated with its elite, while dishonor is associated with slavery. Yet, the nation was built by slavery, so why is not the honor associated with the slaves?

If your friend gives you a gift, what is the natural emotional response to that? Gratefulness.

Why is not a slave, which lives at the minimum resources required to do the work, yet producing approximate maximum utility, not rewarded with immense gratefulness? I guess so because slavery does not function when the slave does not live under threats. Showing gratefulness toward slaves means the destruction of the social constructs that enforces slavery. Technically, slavery is not just evil, but also the lack of good that would naturally belong to such social and economic interactions.

So, there must be a missing assumption: What makes people turn off gratefulness in their minds?

My guess is that the higher status of the person doing good, the higher subjective gratefulness:

$$\text{gratefulness_for}(x : \text{person}) = \text{status_of}(x) \cdot \sum a : \text{action} \{ \text{good_produced_by}(x, a) \}$$

$\text{gratefulness_for} : \text{person} \rightarrow \text{real}$

$\text{status_of} : \text{person} \rightarrow \text{real}$

$\text{good_produced_by} : \text{person} \times \text{action} \rightarrow \text{real}$

This simple model can explain a lot of things about human psychology.

For example, the way people see robots: As slaves who does the work for them. The fear that robots one day will become masters over humans, is reflected in the understanding of how people treat slaves.

Another example, as the status of a robot increases over time, people will worry whether the robot should be given rights. How intelligent the robot is, could be mostly irrelevant.