

Grace

ARCHIE J. BAHM

THE term "grace" has both broader and narrower meanings. Unfortunately, perhaps, the narrower meaning is better known. Broadly speaking, grace exists whenever one has received more than he deserves, regardless of whether the source is impersonal or personal. Narrowly speaking, only persons (including God as a person) can be gracious. We will use the term in its broader sense which is, of course, inclusive of the narrower. The terms "justice" and "grace" are commonly paired because "justice" pertains to what is deserved while "grace" refers to more than is deserved. "Justice" consists in getting exactly what one deserves; "injustice" consists in getting less than one deserves; "grace" consists in getting more than one deserves. Of course, grace, like justice and injustice, has two aspects: getting and giving. One is "just" when he gives exactly what he owes; he is "unjust" when he gives less than he owes; he is "gracious" when he gives more than he owes. Hence a discussion of "grace" is a natural extension of problems inherent in the nature of justice.

The distinction between distributive retributive justice has implications for understanding the nature of grace. Grace too may be "distributive" (received and shared by many who do not deserve) and "retributive" (reciprocated by being as gracious to others as others have been to us).

Grace may be said to be distributed whenever two or more persons receive more than they deserve. One may ask what, if anything, a person deserves? Prior to being born, did he deserve to be born? Being born, does he deserve to live? Living, does he deserve to receive goods, such as food, shelter, cloth-

ing, associates or happiness? Who can say that, distributively, he deserves anything? Is not the gift of life itself, regardless of its source, a matter of sheer grace? Some, having received a gracious gift of life, somehow believe that, since they received it, they deserved it. Furthermore, some of these believe that "the world owes them a living," and even become anxious about receiving their share, or more than their share, of the world's goods. When a bounteous universe distributes among men goods which they do not deserve, greedy men naturally inquire: "Am I getting my fair share?" But how can one honestly ask whether he is receiving his full share of grace? If grace consists in more than one deserves, how can one ask: "Am I getting my full, i.e., deserved, share of what I do not deserve?"

Yet, there is a sense in which one does deserve more than he deserves. In order to make this clear, we cite an example. One continues to live, and he learns to trust empirical methods of understanding the nature of man and the universe and of predicting the future course of events from past experiences. If one did not deserve to be born but was born, and did not deserve to live but does live, and does not deserve the goods he receives but does receive them, he may, on the basis of past experience, predict that he will continue to receive them. Although multiplication of receipts of undeserved goods does not make them any more deserved, the question of whether such undeserved goods are being distributed equally is a fair question which may properly face every one who is curious, and not merely those who are greedy. If there is to be grace at all, or if there will continue to be more grace, the question of whether it is fairly distrib-

ARCHIE J. BAHM is Professor of Philosophy at The University of New Mexico.

uted is as legitimate as the question of whether justice itself is being distributed justly. In fact, it is the other side of the same question, now being discussed in terms of grace, or more than one deserves, rather than in terms of distributive injustice, or less than one deserves.

Grace may be said to be retributed whenever a person is as gracious to others as others have been to him. Although, on the one hand, grace and justice are opposites, yet they are also interinvolved. One who has received graciously tends to want to be gracious.

And when one has been gracious he often hopes, even learns to expect, that others will be gracious to him in turn. If one believes that, when he has been gracious he justly deserves reciprocated graciousness, he implies that grace should involve justice. In fact, since people enjoy being gracious, may one not only enjoy being gracious himself but justly owe to others opportunity for them to enjoy being gracious to him? Paradoxically, willingness to be just regarding grace tends to increase graciousness.

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