

RECIPROCITY:
A CASE OF THE NEGLECTED INTERVENING VARIABLE

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My purpose in this essay is to demonstrate that "reciprocity" is a fundamental category of thought in political theory. Think of the basic concepts used in political theory and what comes to mind? Justice, equality, liberty, power, authority--who would not agree that these are major concepts? Reciprocity, I will argue, is fully as important; yet there is little analytic literature addressed to this concept. There is a natural punishment, in Hobbes's trenchant phrase, for the neglect of a fundamental concept. It is incoherence. My thesis is that political phenomena cannot adequately be explained without reference to reciprocity. The development of political science depends upon a theory of reciprocity, quite as much as upon a theory of justice (for example). This essay will not deliver such a theory, but it will commence a theoretical inquiry which--one hopes--points in the right direction.

A. A Problem with the Dependent Variable

I begin by associating political science with its sister discipline economics, not to subordinate one to the other, but to recognize and build upon an essential union of interests represented in the historical use of the term "political economy." As differentiated from political science, economics has had at least since Smith a good grasp on what is to be the object of explanation. Economists, in other words, know their dependent variable. It is exchange. From a welfare perspective, the dependent variable becomes outcomes of exchange, and exchange an intervening variable. Independent variables in economic theory then refer to various market conditions and arrangements; and the outcomes of exchange are evaluated according to stipulated criteria--

primarily efficiency. The basic economic quantities which an economist tries to explain are attributes of the exchange relation. Price, for example, is the exchange-ratio. The celebrated coherence of economic reasoning has derived, I suggest, from the rather clear and unambiguous nature of the singular dependent (or intervening) variable to which economists share a single-minded devotion. (As we shall see upon further examination, exchanges are not quite so unambiguous as the exchange-concept would seem to suggest; but this must wait.)

What concept occupies a similar position in political science? One possible candidate is "justice." Justice, we are told in The Federalist as well as other sources of political theory, is the end of government. Clearly it is a dependent variable of some substantial interest. But it cannot play the crucial intervening role of exchange. Rather, justice, like efficiency, is an outcome. An outcome of what? The proximate answer must be--of some mode of interaction. Exchange is a conceptualization, not of some state of affairs, but of some mode of action and interaction. What mode of interaction is fundamental to political association? How do we characterize it?

One possibility is coercion. The "state," defining perhaps the arena of interaction within which politics occurs, is often characterized as a monopoly of the legitimate use of force in society. Coercion, then, is a mode of interaction where one person uses force or the threat of force to cause another to do (or not to do) something. The anomaly in this formulation is--where does legitimacy come from? What mode of interaction establishes legitimacy? Is the coercion-mode then subordinated to the legitimation-mode? How can one mode of interaction which rests upon monopoly-power be subordinated to another? The formulation coercion-plus-legitimacy has provided political theory with an

enduring puzzle, but (for that reason) has not given political science an unambiguous dependent variable in the realm of action.

Economists too have endeavored to fill the void in political theory by extending economic reasoning to political phenomena. The standard approach has been to reach politics by the route of market failure--which implies an abandonment of the exchange-mode. Markets fail because exchanges do not occur under specifiable conditions. Unfortunately, the bottom line of many long chains of reasoning in the theory of "public goods" is, again, coercion. Somehow we expect a less ordinary conclusion from the level of argument found in public finance than the commonplace that people must be obligated under penalty of law to pay their taxes. To be sure, the argument provides an intellectual rationale--a form of legitimation--of coercion. And coercion is limited conceptually, thus providing some useful benchmarks for assessing outcomes. But intellectual justification is no substitute for a mode of interaction which, empirically, establishes legitimacy. The want of such a conception becomes evident when we go on to pose the question--what happens when coercion fails? (This can mean either that coercion produces non-legitimate outcomes by some accepted theory or that coercion fails to coerce.) Economists have not had conspicuous success in attending to nonmarket failure. This is because they too have no conception of precisely what--as a mode of interaction--is failing.

B. Exchange and Reciprocity

As alternative modes of interaction, exchange and reciprocity are not sharply distinguishable. One important dimension is shared in common: both are mutual and mutually beneficial transfers. One can think either in terms of an exchange-to-reciprocity continuum or in terms of alternative models of exchange and reciprocity--while recognizing that each model is an idealized abstraction of widely separated

points or ranges on a continuum. An idealized exchange-model, then, does not pretend to capture every nuance of some relationship, which may in fact contain elements of reciprocity. By the same token, a reciprocity-model need not exclude the possibility that many examples of reciprocity as practiced include elements of exchange. By pointing to the continuous nature of the relationship between exchange and reciprocity we thereby emphasize the union of interests between economics and political science--as political economy. At the same time, by constructing alternative models of exchange and reciprocity we can emphasize the distinctive quality of political relationships and the science which addresses them.

The exchange-model used in most economic analysis depicts an impersonal relationship, consisting of an immediate and explicit quid pro quo, and evaluated by each party without reference to the interests of the other. This model also occupies an extreme point on the continuum with reciprocity. As these conditions are relaxed, i.e., as relationships become more personal, the quid pro quo less explicit and less immediate, and evaluation takes into account to some extent the interests of others, the mode of interaction becomes more like reciprocity and less like exchange. Among these conditions, perhaps a central role is played by the immediacy of exchange. Performances are taken to be simultaneous. The words "taken to be" are important because contract law is created to facilitate exchange where performances are not actually simultaneous, and thus claims may arise, but where performances can be treated as simultaneous in principle, i.e, the time-lag creates no grounds for an adjustment in the terms of exchange. Where exchange can be treated as immediate, the quid pro quo is explicit and specific as to terms. The relationship can also be treated as impersonal--the identity of the parties makes no difference in the appropriateness of claims which might arise. Furthermore, the relationship can be

understood as mutually beneficial without any conscious consideration by either party of the interests of the other.

Reciprocity, on the other hand, can be understood as a relationship where one pays today and benefits tomorrow without an explicit quid pro quo. Terms, if any, are less specific. Enforcement in the manner of a contract is not feasible. The identity of the parties may be highly relevant to an ability to sustain the relationship and each party is required (in order for the mode of interaction to function) to take into account the interests of others to a significant degree.

This distinction between exchange and reciprocity is exactly parallel to the distinction made by Hobbes (1962: 106) between contract and covenant. Both represent a transfer of rights. Where performance accompanies the transfer of right, the relation is one of contract. Where one party performs, then must wait for the other to perform, the relationship is one of covenant. I would use "exchange" and "reciprocity" to refer to modes of interaction; and use "contract" and "covenant" as corresponding symbolic expressions. Thus a contract symbolizes an exchange; and a covenant symbolizes reciprocity.

It is also useful to conceptualize n-person reciprocity as distinct from 2-person interactions. Economic activity is ordinarily viewed as a series of essentially two-party transactions. Where a single outcome depends upon arranging some fairly large number of two-party bargains, economists recognize that transaction costs may inhibit individuals from carrying such a process through to its conclusion; exchanges then do not materialize and market failure results. N-person reciprocity, however, does not consist of a series of 2-person interactions. The absence of an immediate and explicit quid pro quo means that n-person reciprocity can be sustained without incurring the level of transaction

costs associated with a comparable N in the realm of exchange. I would argue that the tendency of individuals, when confronted with high transaction costs, is to shift toward reciprocity. Whether or not reciprocity is attained depends of course on whether certain necessary conditions (as yet unspecified) can be met.

It is important to recognize that exchange is not the only mutual beneficial mode of interaction in the world of social relationships. The use of a logic of market failure, as a way of approaching politics, often leads to the notion that there is a market standard against which politics can be judged (and against which politics is always found wanting). Both exchange and reciprocity are mutually beneficial. Government is used as an instrument for facilitating exchange (as in the case of contract law) and as an instrument for facilitating reciprocity. Government may be failing when it inhibits exchange or inhibits reciprocity. In either case, political relationships per se resemble reciprocity more than exchange. Relationships based upon reciprocity should not be mistaken for market imperfection.

C. Reciprocity Literature

Although reciprocity does not have a large literature, there is nevertheless a small body of writing devoted to the concept. It is a noteworthy literature for two reasons. First is its varied, multidisciplinary source: reciprocity literature is sprinkled through law, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and even biology, as well as economics and political science. Second is the fairly consistent use of the concept throughout these varied sources, including a consistent line of distinction drawn between reciprocity and exchange. One suspects, however, that this small set of writing is not

recognized adequately as a coherent body of literature addressed to a coherent subject. In this section of the paper, therefore, I want to indicate both the range of literature and its essential coherence. By drawing together these varied strands of discussion, we create an exciting new potential for productive discourse.

Kenneth E. Boulding, whose work first drew my attention to reciprocity, advances a distinction between reciprocity and exchange in an article titled "The Household as Achilles' Heel" (1972). It is Boulding's contention that economists have not developed a satisfactory theory of the household--a basic unit of economic analysis--because they have not understood the distinctive properties (and advantages) of reciprocity. In his view, the household is the basic institution of reciprocity in human society. Boulding worries, however, about a progressive substitution of exchange for reciprocity in the modern era, especially a continued shift from household relationships to market relationships for supplying basic human wants, such as food-preparation, child-rearing, and (at the extreme) procreation and sex.

Boulding's formulation of reciprocity is not without ambiguity. on the one hand, he argues that altruism as an operative motive is essential to reciprocity. Thus: "I give you something out of the sheer goodness of my heart and you give me something out of the sheer goodness of yours." (Boulding, 1972: 116) At the same time, however, reciprocity requires reciprocation: it must be mutual. Therefore Boulding adds an expectation of reciprocation to the motivational structure: "Of course, if I do not get any return, the sheer goodness of my heart may depreciate." (1972: 116) Boulding further differentiates exchange and reciprocity with respect to bargaining. Quite simply, the process of exchange allows bargaining, but reciprocity does not. Although there is an expectation that others will reciprocate, no bargain is struck.

There is no explicit quid pro quo specifying precise terms and conditions. Boulding refers to the substitution of exchange for reciprocity as a "contractualization" of the relationship (1972: 117). Mutual expectations based upon a limited presumption of altruism are replaced by contingent promises of performance. While it is clear that reciprocity excludes an explicit quid pro quo and any well defined set of contingencies--if you don't do X (or promise to do X), then I won't do Y--, there is a remaining ambiguity as to the relative importance of altruism, resting upon no self-interested calculation, and the expectation of some sort of return.

In the field of jurisprudence Lon Fuller (1969: 19-27) frames a concept of reciprocity that is virtually identical to Boulding's in his effort to demonstrate a necessary linkage between law and morality. He also provides some additional insights. Part of the common ground between exchange and reciprocity is that both can give rise to moral duties. Exchange is characterized as "only a particular expression of this more general, and often more subtle, relationship [of reciprocity.]" (1969: 19) Moreover, "there is no clear stop or breaking point between implicit reciprocity and explicit exchange." (1969: 26) At the same time Fuller conveys the sense that alternative models of exchange and reciprocity can be specified. As the clearest expression of the meaning of reciprocity he quotes from the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them . . ." He then goes on to observe: "What the Golden Rule seeks to convey is not that society is composed of a network of explicit bargains, but that it is held together by a pervasive bond of reciprocity." (1969: 20) To highlight the distinction, Fuller reformulates the Golden Rule in exchange or bargaining terms: "So soon as I have received from you assurance that you will treat me as you yourself would wish to be treated, then I shall be ready in turn to accord a like treatment to you."

(1069: 20) Such a mode of interaction, he contends, could not hold society together. On the other hand, Fuller, like, Boulding, acknowledges a non-altruistic element associated with an expectation of return, and adds the following qualification to the Golden Rules "So soon as it becomes perfectly clear that you have no intention whatever of treating me as you yourself would wish to be treated, then I shall consider myself as relieved from the obligation to treat you as I would wish to be treated." (1969: 21) This conception both allows for a model of reciprocity as distinct from exchange and indicates how the failure of others to reciprocate can cause individuals to withdraw from participation in such a relationship.

Fuller advances three conditions which critically affect the maintenance of reciprocity in a society: (1) voluntary agreement between the parties; (2) an element of equivalence between reciprocal performances; and (3) reversibility of roles in actual practice. Reciprocal duties must be created by the parties themselves. Performances must be in some sense equal in value. And social relationships must exhibit a symmetry such that "the same duty you owe me today, I may owe you tomorrow." (1969: 23) How these conditions can be met in the realm of political association is not a subject Fuller addresses, but one to which we shall have to return.

Fuller's discussion also includes an interesting distinction between reciprocity and what we might call "intimacy." Thus: "One can imagine a social bond that knows nothing of duties. Such a bond might exist between a couple deeply in love, or among a small band of men united by some emergency ... (1969: 21) Reciprocity is not fraternity it does not operate by the principle of "one for all and all for one." (1969: 22) Reciprocity, he notes, requires a standard for determining expected contributions. This is also a thought to which we must later return.

One of the better analytic treatments of reciprocity is found, somewhat surprisingly, in the work of a biologist, Robert L. Trivers, "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism" (1971). Trivers views "reciprocal altruism" as a symbiotic relationship, occurring in both animal and human populations, where the mutual benefit involves a time lags "one partner helps the other and must then wait a period of time before he is helped in turn." He goes on (1971: 39) to make this arguments:

The time lag is the crucial factor, for it means that only under highly specialized circumstances can the altruist be reasonably guaranteed that the causal chain he initiates with his altruistic act will eventually return to him and confer, directly or indirectly, its benefit. Only under these conditions will the cheater [one who does not reciprocate] be selected against and this type of altruistic behavior evolve.

Trivers is of course interested in biological conditions of reciprocity and thus poses his research question in terms of natural selection. His dependent variable, however, is conceptualized in much the same way as in the work of Boulding and Fuller. Trivers adds the important observation that the mutual benefit of reciprocity depends upon each "altruistic" act yielding a benefit to the recipient that is greater than the cost to the performer (1971: 36). No social advantage is to be gained from the reciprocal performance of altruistic acts which are not cost-effective in this sense. In this conception, altruistic individuals are also cost calculators. It would appear that Trivers simply uses the term "altruism" to characterize each performance in a general relationship of reciprocity. Each such act is altruistic only in the sense that the flow of benefit is to others. The maintenance of altruism, however, requires a return. In terms of natural selection, performers must be favored over cheaters. When reciprocity is sustained, it is not a system where individuals engage in self-sacrifice for the sake of group survival (cf. Trivers, 1971: 47).

Trivers suggests three conditions which maximize the probability of selecting for reciprocity: (1) a large number of "altruistic situations" in the life-time of individuals, i.e., situations where there is an opportunity to render a benefit to others greater in value than the cost of providing it (2) repeated interaction among a small set of individuals; and (3) symmetry among pairs of "altruists," i.e., an ability "to render roughly equivalent benefits to each other at roughly equivalent costs." (1971: 37) He goes on to apply these criteria to an analysis of cleaning symbioses among ocean fish, warning calls in birds, and finally to human reciprocity. In the latter case, he argues that natural selection has favored human emotions such as gratitude and sympathy because of the survival value of reciprocity (1971: 49). N-person reciprocity, he notes, is facilitated by the development of language, which allows formulation of rules and the treatment of cheating as rule infraction (1971: 52). Reference to general rules of conduct greatly reduces the cognitive difficulty of judging equivalences among several parties. Trivers also argues that selection favors a "strong show of aggression" when cheating is discovered (1971: 49). This he terms "moralistic aggression" and is characterized by an apparent disproportion between the offense and the aggressive response. What is being punished is not so much the particular offense but the violation of a moral principle.

Among sociologists, reciprocity is typically treated as "social exchange." Peter Blau, a leading social-exchange theorist, develops this concept in much the same terms as reciprocity (1974: 204-214). In contrast to economic exchange, social exchange involves only a "general expectation of reciprocation." (1974: 208) There is no bargaining; the exact nature of the return is "left to the discretion of the one who makes it." (1974: 209) This requires an element of trust in the relationship, unlike the "immediate transfer of goods or the formal contract." (1974: 209) Gouldner (1960) uses the term "reciprocity," but fails to distinguish

social-exchange from market-exchange by defining reciprocity in terms of "mutual contingency." (1960: 163-164) This definition deprives reciprocity of its distinguishing features. Gouldner, however, recognizes that reciprocity is a process potentially subject to failure when persons "seek to get benefits without returning them." (1960: 174) This recognition does not occupy a prominent position in social exchange theory more generally. As Gouldner indicates in a criticism of functional explanation, the explanatory power of social exchange as a theory of inter-individual behavior depends upon the maintenance of reciprocity (1960: 163). The explanation is that individuals enter into social relationships in order to obtain a greater value in return. One contributes to a joint undertaking in view of the exchange-value of his contribution. The difficulty is that this explanation presumes reciprocity where reciprocity may be problematical. By assuming reciprocity social-exchange theory "explains" mutually beneficial patterns of interaction by reducing the relationship to one of simple exchange where individual self-interest is sufficient to account for its occurrence. Social-exchange theory, in other words, treats reciprocity as exchange for the purpose of explanation. Gouldner realizes the inadequacy of this approach. He therefore posits a norm of reciprocity in order to account for individual contributions to reciprocal interactions (1960: 171). He argues that such a norm can help both to initiate and to sustain social interaction (1960: 176). He also suggests that a generalized norm of reciprocity has as an advantage its "comparative indeterminacy" (1960: 175):

Unlike specific status duties and like other general norms, this norm does not require highly specific and uniform performances from people whose behavior it regulates. For example, unlike the status duties of American wives, it does not call upon them to cook and to take care of children. Instead the concrete demands it makes change substantially from situation to situation and vary with the benefits which one party receives from another.

He concludes that the norm of reciprocity "can be applied to countless ad hoc transactions, thus providing a flexible moral sanction for transactions which might otherwise be regulated by specific status obligations." (1960: 175)

The difficulty with positing a norm of reciprocity as an explanation of reciprocity is that one must then explain how the norm is developed and, more critically, how the norm is maintained. In other words, positing a norm simply pushes back the task of determining the limiting conditions under which reciprocity can be sustained. As both Gouldner and Trivers recognize, however, the ability to develop norms or principles of conduct may provide essential instruments which render those limiting conditions more feasible of attainment.

The bulk of empirical work in the study of reciprocity has been done by anthropologists. The work of Malinowski (1932), Thurnwald (1932), and Mauss (1954) has inspired a great volume of descriptive research. [For an overview, see Firth (1967).] The empirical focus has been on the economic organization of primitive societies. Malinowski's study of the Kula trade, for example, found an elaborate pattern of organized gift-exchange as a basic mode of economic interaction. Karl Polanyi (1944: 49) draws upon this primitive model to construct a challenge to market-based theories of economics. The overwhelming thrust of this work, however, is to suggest that reciprocity in modern societies is necessarily a mere shadow of its former prominence. What we see today are traces and, as Boulding worries, traces fast disappearing. The dominant trends in law, economics, and political science give little recognition to reciprocity. The only recent empirical study to accord a central role to reciprocity in modern society is Richard Titmuss's examination of blood donor systems (1971). Titmuss explicitly compares exchange and reciprocity as systems for providing blood for transfusion. His conclusion is that the dependence of this transaction on truth-telling, dictated by the technical difficulty of monitoring the quality of the

blood donation, gives a comparative advantage to reciprocal altruism--by removing an incentive to lie.

The question I want to raise at this point is whether the entire realm of collective action may in fact depend on reciprocity. To be sure, market systems have replaced primitive economies. But politics is ever with us. Among political theorists, only the anarchists have treated reciprocity as a basic mode of political interaction. [See for example Kropotkin (1925).] In the following section of the paper I will argue that the logic of collective action, properly understood, establishes the central position of reciprocity in a theory of politics. In the words of Alvin Gouldner, reciprocity "is a key intervening variable through which shared social rules are enabled to yield social stability." (1960: 161)

D. Reciprocity and Collective Action

A little tinkering with Manchu Olson's basic formulation of the problem of collective action (1965: 9-52) will reveal its relationship to reciprocity. Olson's main contribution to collective-goods literature is his size principle. In continuous terms, the ability of a group to sustain collective action on a voluntary basis and where the sole motivation for collective action is a collective benefit (from which no one in the group can be excluded) decreases with the size of the group. In terms of nominal categories, Olson distinguishes three size ranges with sharply different characteristics. In the case of (1) a small group, there is a presumption that collective action will emerge. In (2) a large group there is a contrary presumption--collective action will not happen. In (3) an intermediate group, there is no presumption--the result is indeterminant. The small group is defined by Olson as one in which at least a single individual has a sufficient incentive to provide the collective good independently. The fraction of the total benefit flowing to at least one individual exceeds the total cost

of providing the good. This creates a presumption that the good will be provided. In his discussion of small groups Olson then is led by his formulation to emphasize disparities in individual demand and the prospect that those with a greater demand will have an incentive to provide some amount of the collective good independently of what others may do. Provision may still be sub-optimal because those with lesser demand are inclined to behave as freeriders. Collective-good provision in Olson's small group is entirely a result of separate calculations of individual advantage. No collective organization is required to produce it. And there is no reciprocity--only unidirectional positive externalities.

Olson's intermediate group is defined as one sufficiently small that each individual makes a perceptible contribution to the total group effort and no single individual derives a sufficient fractional benefit to consider provision of any part of the good independently. Olson passes over this category lightly because he is unable to generate a determinate solution out of economic theory. I want to examine this case more closely.

It becomes clear that Olson's categorization of groups is not entirely a matter of size. More is at work than a size principle. An intermediate group could be as small as three persons, unambiguously. (Two persons create an ambiguity.) Implicit is an additional assumption that there is no great disparity among the demand levels of individual members. The size principle is the proposition that, as the group enlarges, the fractional benefit of each member gets smaller and disparities among the size of the fractions likely decrease (there are problems here with various dimensions of dispersion in an n-person group).

Olson's assumption that each individual demand lies below a level necessary to stimulate individual action to provide any part of the good is a condition I have described as "fragmented demand." (Oakerson, 1978: 34) There is an aggregate

demand sufficient to provide the good, but it is not whole. Total demand cannot be aggregated by summing individual actions. Fractional benefits derive from Olson's assumption of non-excludability among providers. Otherwise individuals could simply appropriate their individual contributions to themselves.

Olson's conclusion is that collective action in this situation is indeterminate. Maybe it will happen; maybe it won't. Suppose it does. Suppose that collective action does occur in an intermediate group. What process must be operative to produce this result? To answer this question we need simply to examine the structure of the situation. Under a condition of fractional benefits and fragmented demand, if collective action occurs, it is because each individual (or a sufficient number of individuals) makes a contribution where the flow of benefit from each individual contributor is primarily to others. This is, by definition, reciprocity.

To have a theory of collective action, we need to be able to specify at least a set of necessary conditions for an intermediate group to engage in reciprocity. The situation is one which invites strategic bargaining and what Trivers (1971: 50) calls "subtle cheating." Individuals may recognize the mutual contingency of their contributions, but a rational response may be to hold out or to fake a contribution depending on what others are expected to do. Two mechanisms are needed. One is to attain a joint recognition of mutual contingency. The other is to provide for expression of individual commitment and mutual assurance.

What are some necessary conditions for providing these mechanisms? One is surely a common language among members of the group. More than the mother tongue, perhaps a language somewhat specialized to the particular collective-action situation of the group is needed. Especially, the language must contain symbols for jointness and commitment [Esee Carter (1979)]. In Hobbesian terms,

the process of reciprocity must find joint expression in a covenant; and there must be periodic opportunity to renew that covenant. In Gouldner's terms, the covenant is an expression of the norm of reciprocity. Covenantal relationships may also rely heavily on symbolic actions as well as words. The symbolic value of these actions lies in the opportunity afforded to express an individual commitment to the common life of the group. The study of collective action in intermediate groups should include a focus on the language and symbolism of reciprocity. Note that part of the significance of this language is that it suppresses strategic bargaining. The language of reciprocity is intended quite literally to drive out the language of bargaining and exchange.

One further mechanism must be operative. To borrow a term from Alchian and Demsetz (1972), reciprocity demands some form of "monitoring." The potential for freerider strategies necessarily requires some mechanism of accountability. Hobbes of course expressly noted that the covenant is insufficient. The advantage of an intermediate group is that each and every member can simultaneously function as a monitor. The group is sufficiently small that members can monitor one another's contributions. This means that individuals must be willing to call one another to account. Reciprocity literature suggests that a precise accounting of specific contributions will not happen; but, rather, that accounting will occur in terms of adherence to general norms of conduct which leave the precise contribution to individual discretion. The intermediate group then becomes not only a community of mutual support, but a community of accountability as well. Popular literature on community tends to emphasize the former. We expect communities to be mutually supportive. This is a valid expectation, but as an exclusive property of community it is misleading. Reciprocity is necessarily a process which entails both mutual support and mutual accounting.

When Olson moves on to the large group, he makes a qualitative shift in his argument. In a large group individual contributions are negligible. The group is also too large for each individual to be cognizant of the contributions of most others. In this situation Olson contends that only a "separate and selective incentive" (1965: 51) applied to each individual member will coax out sufficient contributions to provide a--collective good. The selective incentive can be either a positive or negative sanction. Thus Olson turns for a solution to the problem of collective inaction to either the exchange mode or the coercion mode. Government becomes a case of the coercion mode; interest groups, a case of the exchange mode. We are back again to the alternative languages of exchange and coercion in the realm of politics.

I will consider here only the direct application to government. My contention is that Olson's qualitative shift is too drastic. Monitoring is not absent from the case of the intermediate group. The large group is distinguished by the employment of a specialized monitor. The distinction even on this basis is not clear-cut, however, because an intermediate group may also benefit in some circumstances from limited reliance on specialized monitoring. In the latter situation the specialized monitor is also a member of the community and therefore subject to the non-specialized monitoring of other members. The important question of who-monitors-the-monitor has an easier answer in the intermediate group than in the large group. Where the monitor is viewed as external to the community, more difficult problems arise.

The problem I want to consider at this point is enforcement costs. These include the costs of specialized monitoring in time and effort. I suggest the proposition that potential enforcement costs in a large group are sufficiently great so as to preclude an exclusive reliance on specialized monitoring as a

mechanism for securing individual accountability. This means that to some extent a large group must rely on processes of reciprocity to sustain collective action. Some mixture of specialized and non-specialized monitoring is required. If individuals within a large group are unwilling to call one another to account, provision of the collective good will be grossly sub-optimal. This despite a full panoply of specialized enforcement apparatus. [For a case study of such a circumstance, see Oakerson (1978).]

The intermediate group and the large group therefore represent differences in degree, not in kind as Olson suggests. Collective action in both cases should be conceptualized as a process of reciprocity. This holds at two levels. First, each individual by his action or participation contributes to the welfare of others; and depends for his own welfare on the contributions of others. Secondly, this process cannot be sustained entirely by specialized monitoring; but requires mutual monitoring for adherence to general norms of reciprocity.

Because reciprocity does not depend on precise accountancy, collective good provision cannot be precisely optimal in an economic sense. Olson states the condition for optimality as follows: "The marginal cost of additional units of the collective good must be shared in exactly the same proportion as the additional benefits." (1965: 30) Note the requirement of exact proportions. This requirement cannot be met by reciprocity, which depends upon rough equivalence only. Olson's emphasis in his discussion of the small group, however, is not upon precise optimality because even the small group will fall short. Instead Olson concentrates on the attainment of some significant level of provision. This is also the standard which should apply to reciprocity.

E. Conclusions

The research question suggested by the foregoing discussion is how large groups are able to sustain processes of reciprocity. What is the appropriate mixture of non-specialized and specialized monitoring? What institutional facilities promote reciprocity among citizens? [This is a question posed also by Wildavsky (1979: 252-279).] What sort of infrastructure can facilitate reciprocity, both among citizens and between citizens and officials (i.e., specialized monitors)? Is federalism relevant to such an infrastructure? Are both small-scale and large-scale voluntary associations relevant as "mediating" groups?

In all these questions, the dependent variable is reciprocity. My effort in this paper has been to conceptualize that dependent variable and place it in the context of political theory. How to explain reciprocity is the organizing question of our research agenda. There is also a theoretical agenda. What model of man is appropriate for understanding reciprocity? We cannot simply postulate a norm of reciprocity as part of that model; for reciprocity is what we want to explain. Does reciprocity preclude self-interest? (I think not.) But reciprocity does surely require, as in Hobbes, a capacity for moral reasoning. Perhaps the best modern formulation is found in Piaget's conception of "moral autonomy," (Piaget, 1973) a concept closely connected to reciprocity as Wildavsky (1979) has recognized. The property of sympathy or empathy, as developed by Adam Smith in The Theory of Moral Sentiments may also be pertinent.

My immediate purpose is no more than to suggest these questions. This depends upon a recognition of reciprocity, however, as a fundamental dependent variable of interest. Reciprocity is central to a logic of collective action. The status usually accorded to coercion ought instead to be given to reciprocity. Coercion is marginal, not fundamental. It is in some cases a necessary condition

of collective action, but it is not a constitutive principle. Reciprocity is that constitutive principle. Acts of reciprocity structure collective action in the same sense that exchanges structure a market. Neither a theory of exchange nor a theory of coercion (i.e., sovereignty) can provide an adequate basis for understanding collective action. Outcomes of reciprocity (where reciprocity becomes an intervening variable) are derivative concepts. A theory of justice, without reference to processes of reciprocity which can produce justice, is not an empirically relevant theory. As Rousseau remarked in The Social Contract (1950: 34): "Doubtless, there is a universal justice emanating from reason alone; but this justice, to be admitted among us, must be mutual."

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