



# Beyond Profit and Politics: Reciprocity and the Role of For-Profit Business

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## Abstract

Standard accounts of reciprocal citizenship hold that citizens have a duty to participate in politics. Against this, several business ethicists and philosophers have recently argued that people can satisfy their obligations of civic reciprocity non-politically, by owning, managing, or working in for-profit businesses. In this article, I reject both the standard and the market accounts of reciprocal citizenship. Against the market view, I show that the ordinary work of profit maximization cannot take the place of traditional political activity. Yet contra the standard political account, I show that a special class of the actions we perform in our work as employers and employees in for-profit companies can fulfill our obligations of reciprocity. Business ethicists must therefore develop a more nuanced account of the relationship between for-profit business endeavors and the debts we owe fellow citizens who undertake burdensome political work to our benefit.

**Keywords** Civic virtue · Political obligation · Reciprocity

## Introduction

There are many moral responsibilities we arguably acquire by belonging to political communities—duties of non-complaint against just exercises of power by legitimate governments, responsibilities of care, obligations to speak out when our state acts wrongly, and others (Applbaum 2010; Beerbohm 2012; Scheffler 1997). Among these, one of the most important is the responsibility to repay fellow citizens for the work they do when they make the effort to vote well, serve in the armed forces, pay taxes, take public service jobs, or undertake other civic actions that could benefit us. If we fail to live up to this responsibility, we do wrong by those who have done right by us (Koltonski 2016; Sangiovanni 2007).

Political philosophers have long held we can pay these debts only by acting politically in turn—by ourselves voting, running for office, campaigning, calling our senators, paying

taxes, or writing letters to the editor.<sup>1</sup> Call this the *Standard Account of Reciprocal Citizenship*.<sup>2</sup> On this view, citizens:

1. have civic debts—duties of reciprocity owed to co-nationals who engage in traditional political and civic behaviors; and
2. can repay these debts only by undertaking political and civic acts.

In recent years, this account has been challenged by a growing cadre of philosophers and business ethicists who accept that citizens have duties of reciprocity to their politically active co-nationals, but deny that citizens can pay these debts only by acting politically in turn. They argue the standard account fetishizes political participation by undercounting the moral significance of for-profit work. Because for-profit business activities help improve others'

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<sup>1</sup> The behaviors that qualify as political are typically unspecified in these discussions, but the list described here involves the acts typically mentioned. For similar lists, see Brennan (2012), citing in part to Oldfield (1990), and Klosko (2004). As we will see, it is a benefit of the civic works account I defend in section five that it provides a clear framework for assessing the status of specific acts.

<sup>2</sup> While some defend the special status of political activity explicitly (Oldfield 1990; Pettit 1999) an even larger array of philosophers do so implicitly, by contending citizens have duties to undertake specific

lives, advocates of the market view contend that employer and employees satisfy the reciprocal duties of citizenship simply by showing up for work. Consequently, people who participate in successful commercial ventures are freed from the reciprocal obligation to undertake what have long been understood as the representative tasks of good citizenship—voting, campaigning, running for office, engaging in public deliberation, writing letters to elected officials, volunteering, participating in community organizing, taking public service jobs, serving in the military, even—on some accounts—obeying certain laws or paying taxes<sup>3</sup> (G. Brennan and Lomasky 2000, 2006; Brennan 2011; Schmidt 2005). Community members can pay their civic debts simply by working as stockbrokers or venture capitalists, selling refrigerators, or opening tanning salons. CEOs, and others in positions to create substantial market value, would thus do well not to “waste [their] time with politics” (Brennan 2011).

Call this the *Market Account of Reciprocal Citizenship*. On this view, citizens:

1. have civic debts, duties of reciprocity owed to co-nationals who engage in traditional political and civic behaviors; and
2. can repay these debts by acting politically *or* by working in ordinary ways as the owners, managers, or employees of for-profit businesses.

The market account enjoys growing popularity in both academic and non-academic circles. Politicians routinely praise business leaders as excellent citizens in virtue of their commercial success.<sup>4</sup> In the same vein, legislators often suggest each of us has a civic duty to participate in commerce.<sup>5</sup>

My aim in this article is to assess the relationship between for-profit business endeavors and the debts we owe fellow citizens for the work they do when they undertake traditional political and civic acts for our benefit. Against the market account, I argue that the ordinary work of profit maximization cannot take the place of traditional political activity in repaying our fellow citizens. At the same time, I accept an important premise of the market account’s critique. Contrary to the

standard account, I contend it is not necessary for citizens to act politically in order to pay their debts to co-nationals.

I will argue for the following position. Rather than having to undertake traditional political acts *per se*, what citizens owe their politically active co-residents is a *fitting return* for the work they do.<sup>6</sup> This return can take the form of conventional political action *or* one of a distinctive class of actions citizens can perform in their lives as employers and employees. What is important, as I will argue, is that these actions have the appropriate scope, content, intent, and proportionality. It turns out that meeting these criteria crosscuts the distinction between political and market activities. The real relationship between for-profit business and good citizenship is thus more nuanced than either the standard account or market opponents recognize.

### Political Obligation and the Market Account: A Primer

Underlying both the market and standard accounts is a commonsense notion: we ought to pay our debts.<sup>7</sup> The idea is this. Political communities like ours provide positive benefits such as physical security, a clean environment, and public health.<sup>8</sup> Providing these goods is costly. To bring them about, our fellow citizens take on morally optional burdens many would prefer to avoid—becoming politically informed, voting, calling their elected representatives, volunteering as firefighters, paying taxes, running free community clinics, volunteering in the military or for the PTA, and otherwise acting civically.<sup>9</sup> Without their discretionary efforts—for

<sup>6</sup> Assuming the citizens and state exercise political power in a sufficiently just manner.

<sup>7</sup> This idea is commonly promoted by scholars who argue that a concern for fairness gives citizens a duty to obey the law. Though advocates of the market account accept (at least for the sake of argument) that citizens of just states owe debts to co-nationals, they do not explicitly endorse fairness as grounding these debts. Indeed, many provide no explanation of what grounds such debts (Brennan 2011, p. 49). However, in accepting the possibility of these debts advocates of the market theory become responsible for an account of what characteristics an act or set of acts would have to possess to satisfy these debts. That is what we consider here.

<sup>8</sup> At issue is what citizens owe when they are subjects of (at least relatively) just states that provide these goods. Different concerns arise in malevolent or unjust states. Since neither the market nor the standard account is directed toward non-ideal conditions, we will not take them up here. Reasonably just states provide citizens with levels of health and security they would not otherwise enjoy. This is true both because they aid citizens against others’ wrongdoing (as in the case of police protection) and because fellow citizens take risks that protect us against harms that might ensue even if others acted in accordance with moral ideals (as in the case of volunteer firefighters).

<sup>9</sup> Readers unfamiliar with the literature on political obligation might be surprised to see paying taxes described as morally discretionary because it is legally mandatory. However, whether citizens have

Footnote 2 (continued)

political actions like voting or obeying the law (Gilbert 2006; Klosko 2004; Dagger 1997; Beerbohm 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Jianfeng Zhu (2014) argues citizens have no standing duty to obey because they can contribute value in other ways, including through non-political actions.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Ram Nath Kovind, President of India, declared, “That young person who founds a start-up and becomes a job creator is a nation builder” (“President Ram Nath Kovind,” 2017).

<sup>5</sup> After the September 11th terrorist attacks, for example, President Bush famously urged Americans to do their part by shopping more (Bush 2001; Murphy and Purdum 2009). Economists and sociologists note there exists widespread belief that it is patriotic to spend (Shiller 2012).

which they receive no direct compensation—we would not enjoy the benefits that we do.<sup>10</sup> That others intentionally work toward our good at a cost to themselves generates demands for reciprocity. Each of us thus owes a debt to our politically active co-nationals<sup>11</sup> (Brennan 2011, p. 49; Klosko 1994; Shelby 2007).

Some may disagree with this account. Anarchists and voluntarists such as Robert Nozick, A. John Simmons, and Robert Paul Wolf, for example, deny that the receipt of benefits generates moral obligations (Nozick 1974; Wolff 1998; Simmons 2005). Advocates of consent, role obligations, complicity or other accounts contend that our civic responsibilities have other grounds (Beerbohm 2012; Hardimon 1994; Horton 2010). However, that other citizens' work to our benefit gives rise to duties of reciprocity is accepted as uncontroversial by advocates of both the standard and market accounts.<sup>12</sup> They address themselves to the important question of what citizens must do to satisfy this duty if indeed they have such an obligation. For the purposes of discussion, we will therefore set debates about the existence of such duties aside.

At issue between advocates of the market and standard accounts of reciprocal citizenship is how we must behave to pay these debts. Proponents of the standard view contend citizens can do so only by acting politically or in ways traditionally associated with civic life—voting well, running

for office, calling our senators, or taking jobs in public service. Champions of the market account argue we can satisfy the balance by serving in ordinary ways as employers and employees of for-profit companies. As Jason Brennan puts it, “Larry Page and Sergey Brin could exercise civic virtue by creating and running Google. Randall Smith (of Mesa Boogie) could exercise civic virtue by continuing to make good amplifiers,” and so on (2012, p. 313).

The case for the market account rests on two commonplace ideas: that we can pay others back for the good they do us in coins other than that in which they paid, and that for-profit businesses contribute to human well-being. Since we need not repay others' efforts in kind, we can compensate our politically engaged fellow citizens by benefiting them in other ways—and for-profit businesses provide quite a lot of value. David Schmidtz writes, “Any decent car mechanic does more for society by fixing cars than by paying taxes” (2005, p. 91). Jason Brennan contends that in praising civic virtue we must, “consider artists, entrepreneurs, small-business owners, venture capitalists, teachers, physicians, intellectuals, stock traders... janitors, grocery clerks... each of these kinds of people in one way or another contribute to fostering a worthwhile society. They each help create the bundle of goods others in their society receive” (2011, p. 52).

## A Fitting Return

It is true that we can repay the good others do for us by engaging in actions other than those they undertook to our benefit. If you give me a ride to the airport, I can repay the debt by buying you dinner. If I wash your car, you can reciprocate by fixing my cabinet. It is equally true that for-profit businesses contribute to human welfare and happiness. My life is better because I can buy dinner on the go when I am tired, I am healthier because I can pay for a flu vaccination, and I am happier because I can watch *Game of Thrones*.

Nonetheless, merely running or working for a for-profit business does not pay our civic dues. To see this, we need to think carefully about the characteristics an action must possess to repay a debt.<sup>13</sup> I will argue that an act or set of acts must satisfy four desiderata: *scope*, *content*, *intent*, and *proportionality*. The first concerns the subject of an act, the second the substance, the third the actor's motivation, and the fourth the relationship between the act and the good for which it is to constitute recompense. To qualify as a fitting return, actions must be the right kind and reach the right people, for the right reasons, to the right degree.

Footnote 9 (continued)

a moral obligation to obey such laws is one of the most prominent debates of contemporary political philosophy, and the contention that citizens have a moral responsibility to comply is widely defended as following only from the duties of reciprocity we consider here. It is not thought entailed even by the conclusion that governments are legitimate in coercively compelling the behavior in question (Klosko 1987, 1994, 2004; Koltonski 2016; Sangiovanni 2007; Sartorius 1981). For our purposes, it is notable that many citizens do not pay taxes only because they are forced to do so or fear punishment. Instead, they act out of a desire to contribute or a belief that they ought morally to do so, for much the reasons detailed in this article (Klosko 2005; Williamson 2017; Stern 1995). Indeed, this is central to the functioning of most western political communities. It would be very costly—and likely unworkable—if all tax compliance had to be extracted by force. By paying their taxes absent active force, individuals thus work to the benefit of fellow citizens, in a way many philosophers contend is morally discretionary.

<sup>10</sup> Extensive empirical research suggests that morally (and in many cases legally) discretionary civic behaviors play an important role in providing benefits like public health, safety, and desirable opportunities. (Freeman 2000; Claibourn and Martin 2007; Lowry 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Importantly, these debts are owed to fellow citizens who take up such morally discretionary work to our benefit, not to the government itself. This is one of the factors that distinguish reciprocity-based accounts of civic obligation from gratitude theories (Walker 1988; Klosko 2004).

<sup>12</sup> For example, even Jason Brennan (2011, p. 49) who doubts that citizens have a debt to society, takes the issue at hand to be a theory of what repayment requires if they do.

<sup>13</sup> We will be considering only debts owed to those who benefit us at a cost, not retributive debts or costless benefits.

## Scope

*Scope* demands an act be oriented (directly or indirectly) at the benefactor or benefactors whose behavior generated a debt. I cannot return the care a friend gives me when I am sick by helping my brother move. I cannot repay the hospital that saved my life by bringing flowers to the physicians' assistants at a different establishment. The aid is aimed in the wrong direction. Similarly, if Melissa, Joan, and H. L. A. Hart help change my tire, I cannot provide a fully fitting return by benefiting Melissa alone. I owe them all.

Some apparent exceptions cause confusion. I can repay a friend's assistance by donating to her favorite charity, or return the kindness a stranger showed me in buying me a train ticket when my credit card would not work by doing the same for a homeless woman. These acts qualify because they are indirectly oriented toward the correct subjects. I can pay back my friend by donating to her favorite charity because *she* would like me to do so. I can repay the stranger's kindness by benefiting others because my behavior honors the very values *she* sought to promote. The fittingness-making properties of my acts point back to the original benefactors.<sup>14</sup>

## Content

The *content* criterion has a similar structure. An act must be good for a benefactor (or by a benefactor's lights) to qualify as a fitting response for a good received.<sup>15</sup> Fitting returns embody a version of the golden rule: we ought to do good to those who do good for us. The alternative would be highly peculiar—you could repay a kindness with harm, or by an act that provided no value. Picture: "Thank you for driving me to the airport. In return, I have kicked your cat, or uselessly watched paint dry." Being good for a benefactor can be indirect in the way that scope can. As in that case, such acts qualify as fitting because of their connection to the benefactor's interests. I can do you good by getting medicine for your beloved dog, or helping your child learn math.

## Intent

*Intent* focuses on an actor's motivating reasons for acting. To provide a fitting return, an actor must seek to advance her benefactor's interests. This need not be her only motivation, but it must be within her motivational set, and consistent

<sup>14</sup> There is an interesting question as to whether benefactors can specify the form a return must take. I set that aside; however, since our point persists no matter how, this question is answered.

<sup>15</sup> There is significant dispute as to whether reciprocity requires the return of a good that is subjectively or objectively good for a recipient. Because this question lies outside the scope of our discussion, I will not take it up here.

with the way she structures and weighs her reasons. My inept attempts to poison you do not constitute a fitting return for your kindness, even if all they succeed at is providing you with a tasty snack.

Of course, simply having the right motivation is not enough to repay a debt. We must distinguish mere intentions from appropriately motivated actions. The former is not sufficient to repay onerous work undertaken to an actor's benefit, though it may qualify her as having good character. If I intend to benefit you, but have not found an opportunity to act, I remain in arrears. But if I reasonably try to act toward your benefit, and the good happens not to ensue, I may nonetheless have paid my debt. This follows from the fourth aspect of fittingness, proportionality.

## Proportionality

Proportionality is the element of fittingness that most divides advocates of the market and standard accounts. Put simply, the idea is intuitive: to qualify as a fitting return acts must have weight proportional to that of the act for which compensation is due. Imagine you cross mountains, forge streams, and take great risks to save my life, and I repay you with a pack of Twizzlers. Assuming you like licorice my act has the right scope, content, and intent—it is a benefit, intentionally directed at you. But it lacks the appropriate weight. As Lawrence Becker writes, underlying demands for reciprocity is the notion that, "we ought to be disposed, as a matter of moral obligation to return good in proportion to the good we receive" (1986, p. 3).

What adds controversy is that there are two ways we can understand this requirement. Consider US Poet Laureate Billy Collins's poem, "The Lanyard." Collins writes of his mother:

She gave me life and milk from her breast  
and I gave her a lanyard  
she nursed me in many a sick room, lifted spoons of  
medicine to my lips  
laid cold face-clothes on my forehead, and then led me  
out into the airy light  
and taught me to walk and swim  
and I, in turn, presented her with a lanyard.  
Here are thousands of meals, she said  
and here is clothing and a good education.  
And here is your lanyard, I replied  
which I made with a little help from a counselor.  
(2005, p. 45)

The poem ends with, "the rueful admission that when she took/the two-tone lanyard from my hand,/I was as sure as a boy could be that this useless, worthless thing I wove/out of boredom would be enough to make us even" (Collins 2005, p. 45).



There are two ways to explain what makes this admission appropriately rueful, tracking two things that come in degrees such that a proportional amount of them might be required to make a debtor and benefactor even: the benefit provided, and the effort involved. On the first, the problem for Collins is outcome-based—his “useless, worthless” lanyard does not benefit his mother enough. On the second, the issue is input—the hours Collins spent weaving the lanyard out of boredom asked far less of him than parenting cost his mother.

Proponents of the market account of reciprocal citizenship endorse the benefit approach to proportionality. Jason Brennan, for example, writes “to pay your debts to society does not always require that you sacrifice your self-interest. It just requires that you provide sufficiently valuable goods and services to society in return” (2011, p. 58). This is pivotal to the conclusion that for-profit business activities pay our civic debts by benefiting our fellow citizens.

I think understanding reciprocity as requiring a proportional return of value is a mistake. Against that view, I will defend a version of the burden-based approach. Let me therefore start by arguing for the centrality of burden to the fittingness of a return against the view that proportionality is concerned with benefit alone.

Consider what arouses our sense that a debt is owed. We worry about providing a fitting return when others intentionally benefit us *at a cost*. Absent such expense, benefits trigger no such concern. If seeing you joyfully riding a rollercoaster brings me great pleasure, it does not seem “only fair” that I give you something in return. The discovery that hearing me happily sing to myself cheered you on a bad day gives me no claim on you for reciprocation. This is true even when the benefit is weighty. If witnessing your joy keeps me going on a dark night, I do not suddenly acquire a greater duty of repayment. When benefits are burden-less, the benefited do not seem to owe anything.

It can be challenging to recognize this because we have trouble envisioning costless benefits, which mistakenly primes our intuitions to think that returns are owed whenever benefits are received. The closest equivalent is cases where very little cost is incurred, or where the cost is entirely repaid. Such instances reflect the significance of sacrifice to understanding reciprocity. If listening to a Katy Perry album (that you paid for) helps you get through a particularly difficult personal moment—saves your life even—you are not suddenly in moral arrears because the benefit received went up. Something would seem terribly off if Perry showed up at your door demanding you compensate her for the extra benefit. What generates the need for reciprocity—and determines

the amount owed—is the cost incurred by the benefactor, not the benefit received.<sup>16</sup>

Consider further that burdens can generate debts even when no benefit ensues. I owe you if you travel across town to bring me my spare keys, even if I find the originals a moment before you show up. The same is true if you leap into a flaming car to rescue me, even if your efforts fail to mitigate my burns. What demands response is the fact that you were *burdened* by trying to provide me with a benefit, not the fact that I *received* a good, since in both cases, none was achieved.

If burdens are what generate concern for reciprocity, it seems reasonable to think they are integral to understanding what pays our debts. This speaks against the benefit theory of proportionality.

Our intuitions about degrees of indebtedness further highlight the significance of burden. Imagine a friend on crutches brings you your misplaced keys across town, an act that costs her hours of effort. If proportionality focused on benefit alone, you would owe her an equivalent good—say bringing her keys in return. But that seems a seriously inadequate return if you are not suffering from a similar mobility challenge.<sup>17</sup> The mismatch is explained by the different degrees of burden involved. A painful task for her is an easy jaunt for you. The benefit-added approach gets the case wrong.

The importance of burden is further underscored by the difference in how the two approaches to proportionality understand the status of the disabled, impoverished and un-empowered.<sup>18</sup> As several critics have noted, a view that

<sup>16</sup> Two further things cause confusion. First, many things people associate with the repayment of debts often involve moral obligations of promising or contract, not reciprocity. Take, for example, a case where one person lends another five dollars. Many will have the intuition that repayment demands five dollars, regardless of burdens incurred. What generates the duty, however, is that one party agrees to pay the other a certain amount for an act, which the former has no otherwise existing moral obligation to provide. Such up-front contractual arrangements differ from circumstances that trigger moral claims of reciprocity. The benefit is extracted as part of a mutual promise, not simply a good deed done. Second, we often employ epistemic shorthand that lead to confusion. It is ordinary to think that if you give somebody five dollars when they forget their wallet, they should pay your five dollars. The burden-based view suggests this need not follow, which may seem a mark against. However, I believe our intuitions about such cases arise from the fact that for most of us, five dollars means (roughly) the same amount of burden. Most of us are not billionaires lending to paupers, which generates an ease of shorthand that such debts should be repaid in the same degree. This shorthand proves misleading when burdens meaningfully differ.

<sup>17</sup> In fact, your bringing the lost keys would provide her greater benefit, since it would be more difficult for her to get the keys herself.

<sup>18</sup> The relationship between disability and justice is more complex than we can take up here. However, others have considered the issue in detail. For example, Nussbaum (2009) complains that acts of the disabled are not given full credit in most discussions of reciprocity.

measures the fittingness of a return by the benefit added suggests such individuals can never treat others fairly.<sup>19</sup> Bill Gates can save the life of a poor child in rural India by paying for the distribution of malaria nets, at an almost imperceptible fraction of his wealth. But it is unlikely the child can provide Gates a similar benefit, no matter how much of her resources she dedicates to the task. Measured by benefit provided, the child is therefore in permanent moral arrears, or treated as beyond the reach of moral claim. That conclusion contradicts everything that drives our moral intuitions about reciprocity. Well-motivated disempowered individuals do not take advantage when they work to the best of their ability.

In contrast, assessing proportionality by burden-paid requires no such problematic judgments. The benefit cost Gates little. In turn, the child owes it to him to take up a similarly minimal burden on his behalf.<sup>20</sup> A burden-based approach thus does a better job of capturing the moral status of such persons.

It follows that such an approach provides a more compelling account of a proportional return, one that demands neither too little nor too much. It does a better job of instantiating what it means for the poor, the blessed, the lucky, and the unlucky among us to act reciprocally.

Opponents raise three objections. The burden-based approach to proportionality, they contend, asks too little of the cheerful, too much of the misanthropic, and demands people undertake pointless or less beneficial actions simply because they entail the right cost (Brennan 2011, pp. 57–59). However, these concerns are mistaken.

Start with the cheerful. Consider Pollyanna, who enjoys political participation. Because Pollyanna *likes* volunteering, attending meetings, and voting, these actions demand little of her. If proportionality requires burden, it seems she must either do quite a lot, or deliberately take up things she detests. The former seems unduly burdensome, the latter silly (Brennan 2011, pp. 57–59).

We will discuss the latter worry shortly. For now, focus on the first. The worry that Pollyanna must do too much rests on confusion. It is true Pollyanna must undertake more acts to pay her debts than a natural misanthrope. But it does not follow that the burden-based account of proportionality places *more burden* on the cheerful. Pollyanna does more because the personal opportunity cost to her of each action is less, just as it costs a billionaire less to pay \$10,000 in taxes than a person who makes \$40,000 a year. Objectors

are likely projecting their own dislike of politics onto Pollyanna's situation.

In truth, Pollyanna must do far less than critics fear. Their calculations fail to consider the value of being able to decide what to do with your time or the way in which opportunity costs compound. Consider my own situation. I like talking with friends, I like thinking about ethics, I like coffee, and I like playing board games. It is no burden to demand I do any of those things. But I would not enjoy a day in which I was required to have six coffees with friends, play seven board games, and teach five classes. That would constitute a serious burden. The same is true of Pollyanna. That she enjoys each civic act does not mean she would enjoy having to do all of them. Once we consider aggregation and the value of having your own time, it becomes clear the burden-paid view makes quite reasonable demands on even the most cheerful among us.

Similar miscalculations underlie the worry that a view of proportionality that measures burden demands too little of the lazy. Think of a person who hates all civic acts. Jason Brennan provides an example:

Katrin has had many resources invested in her, has attended excellent schools, and consumed many expensive goods over her lifetime. However, she has worked a total of six-months, part-time in her lifetime. She has not done much else to benefit society either. Katrin is lazy and unmotivated. She dislikes being productive. Though she's hardly done anything, what little work and volunteering she has done, she's hated. If you thought that the way to pay our debts to society is to suffer a certain amount, then you might conclude that Katrin has paid her debts because she's suffered enough. This seems implausible. (2011, p. 59)

As with Pollyanna, this criticism refuses to take Katrin's experience seriously. On one reading, the argument is true: if Katrin's laziness is the product of a negligent failure to manage her dispositions. Each of us can shape our habits of mind to some degree. If Katrin encourages herself in finding civic acts burdensome, she takes advantage. Her behavior is not consistent with the intent component of a fitting return. She does not seek to do well by her benefactors.

But we can tell the story differently. Imagine Katrin suffers from anhedonia—the inability to find pleasure in any activity—a common symptom of depression. Her disinterest is not a cultivated desire to take advantage, but a mental disability. Why should we take this less seriously than a physical disability? If we would say that a person on crutches can repay her debts though providing less value because each act is more difficult, why should we say any less of Katrin? It is more burdensome for her to act. The personal opportunity cost of her doing so is higher. The burden-based account of proportionality does not ask that we simply take

<sup>19</sup> Becker (2005) makes a similar point.

<sup>20</sup> There are, of course, reasons of justice beyond reciprocity why Gates may owe the child this lifesaving opportunity. Nevertheless, the case is illustrative.

peoples word for it that the costs they face are higher than those encountered by others—but it does demand that we recognize when they are.

Finally, critics worry that a burden-based approach to proportionality demands that people undertake pointless or less beneficial acts simply because these acts come at the correct cost (or at least suggests doing so satisfies their obligations of reciprocity). Must Pollyanna do whatever she happens to hate? Jason Brennan worries,

If Luke decides to contribute to society by becoming a policeman rather than an investment banker, he will probably bear higher personal costs, given the differences in pay and risk. However, it does not follow that society gains more... if Luke wants to contribute as much as possible to society, he will not search for the role that costs him the most. He will search for the role in which he will do the most good. (2011, p. 58)

This criticism, however, fails to recognize that the proportionality requirement operates in conjunction with the other aspects of a fitting return—scope, content, and intent. As we saw earlier these desiderata of fittingness require individuals intentionally act to the benefit of their benefactors. It is commonplace to think we ought to be well disposed to people who act to our benefit. Being well disposed involves (at the very least) a desire that our benefactors be made better off when doing so is costless. This gives us reason to work at advancing their interests, when we have a choice between an action that will do them more good, and one that provides them less benefit.<sup>21</sup>

The demand for a proportional return is thus not simply a demand *that you be burdened* as much as your benefactor, it is a demand that you *work to provide your benefactors with a benefit until such point as further efforts would cost you more than the burden the benefactor took on to your benefit*. This clarifies how we should think about Luke's decision. As shaped by the content, scope, and intent requirements, the right account of proportionality focuses on the *provision of benefits that come at a cost*. Luke should thus search for the roles in which he will do the most good, not the ones that cost him the most. However, in those roles he should take up burdens that are necessary to the production of benefits for his fellow citizens until his sacrifice on their behalf equals his own. All roles involve some opportunities to do further good at some cost. In Luke's case, that might mean donating

<sup>21</sup> It is an interesting philosophical question whether this requires that we work to provide them with as much benefit as possible, with a comparable benefit, or simply with some benefit. However, we will set such questions aside since advocates of the market view do not take up these issues with any precision, and they lie outside the immediate scope of our concern. For our purposes, any of these standards will serve.

more funds from what he earns as an investment banker, not entering law enforcement.

This leaves us with the following account of what it means to provide benefactors a fitting return. We can call it the *Reparations Theory of a Fitting Return*. To repay a debt owed to people who intentionally undertake burdensome act for your benefit, you must:

1. *Intent*—Intentionally
2. *Scope*—seek to provide your benefactors
3. *Content*—with benefits of (at least) comparable value to those you received
4. *Proportionality*—until such point as the costs of further work to their benefit would exceed the burden the benefactor took on your good.<sup>22</sup>

## The Market Account Reconsidered

This account of fittingness provides the basis for an argument against the market account.

Even if the ordinary work of for-profit corporations can have the right intent, content, and scope to provide a fitting return for the beneficial political acts of fellow citizens (which I will argue is not a straightforward matter), it does not satisfy the proportionality requirement. If the reparation approach to fittingness is correct, citizens cannot satisfy their civic obligations of reciprocity simply by working in for-profit businesses, as advocates of the market view argue they can.

To see this, we need to apply what we have learned about fittingness to the case of civic debt. How does for-profit work compare to the criteria we have identified?

### Scope, Content, and Intent

Assume the employers and employees of for-profit businesses act consistently with the intent desiderata. Many surely do. Their aim, at least in part, is to provide value to their community.

We will start then with the content and scope criteria. Recall, this requires debtors benefit their benefactors. In the case at hand, that demands each of us aid co-nationals who intentionally undertake burdensome political acts to our gain.

When arguing that for-profit business activities fulfill duties of reciprocity, proponents of the market account

<sup>22</sup> To be precise, or until further action becomes so burdensome that the receipt of the original goods would cease to qualify as a benefit, given the cost involved in repayment. (This is definitional of what it means to receive a benefit.)

typically focus on the goods and services businesses produce. Jason Brennan, for example, says Randall Smith of Mesa Boogie pays his civic debts “by continuing to make good amps” (2012, p. 313). The implication is that for-profit businesses satisfy the content and scope criteria by supplying products people enjoy.

That, however, will not do. At issue is what we can call *the problem of diversity*. The content and scope requirement demand you provide all your benefactors with goods that benefit *them* (directly or indirectly). People have different tastes, aims, and projects. What constitutes a benefit to one might be actively harmful to another. A glass of milk is not a gain to the lactose-intolerant. So simply producing a good that *many* people like will not complete your debts of reciprocity. Guitar amps do not benefit those who hate music.

In small-scale cases, the problem of diversity is easily solved. Each of us can know what counts as a benefit to benefactors, and can provide something appropriate. Carla does not eat sugar, Jenn loves sugar but hates bananas, Steve does not have a car and likes margaritas, Barry worries about his dog, and Neda appreciates whiskey, but not blue cheese. When I stay at Jenn’s house I can therefore repay her by making brownies (but not banana bread). When Steve waters my plants, I can reciprocate with drinks but not oil changes.

Diversity proves more problematic when it comes to civic debts. That there are millions of fellow citizens makes reciprocating by providing preferred goods impossible. While I can pay Jenn back with brownies, and Neda with whiskey, I cannot send every citizen products that match their individual preference set. The direct provision of goods proves a hopeless mechanism for paying civic debts.

This is equally true of for-profit businesses. Employers and employees of for-profit companies can no more hope to know nor to satisfy the idiosyncratic preferences, projects, or aims of all citizens than they could in their private lives. Jenn does not like bananas any more when they are provided by Chiquita. The CEO cannot realistically make up the debt by mailing her brownies or washing the car of every citizen like her. For these reasons, the direct provision of desired goods cannot satisfy the content criteria. While any given citizen might be repayable in this fashion, the citizenry is not.

Notice, this is a *practical*, not a *conceptual* claim. In *theory*, it is possible to pay civic debts through the direct provision of goods—a dollop of caviar here, a bottle of aspirin there, a Hawaiian shirt, a Humvee. In *practice*, however, this mechanism cannot fulfill civic debts. Our co-nationals are too numerous, their interests too divergent, to satisfy in this piecemeal fashion.

So the story is not as simple as “Mesa Boogie produces guitar amplifiers people like therefore Randall Smith has paid his civic debts.” That does not mean there is no way the work of for-profits satisfies the content criteria. Though they

cannot do so by simply producing goods, businesses can do so *indirectly* by contributing to general well-being. There are two ways this can be true.

First, businesses contribute to universally desirable goods such as public health, a clean environment, and safety. Unlike the manufacture of Chia Pets or driving gloves, these are things every citizen has reason to desire. Indeed, many philosophers argue citizens have political obligations specifically because political acts promote such goods.<sup>23</sup> For-profits similarly help secure health and safety. Businesses that construct emergency vehicles produce body armor for soldiers, lay roads, or design crash-resistant cars all contribute to health and safety. In doing so, they satisfy the content and scope criteria.

However, that is not enough to justify the market account’s sweeping claim that merely working for a for-profit business satisfies one’s civic debts. While the makers of ambulances, Tasers, or insulin pumps contribute to public health and safety, the same cannot be said of those who manufacture high-end whiskey or sell Doritos. Though EMTs *enjoy* fancy coffee, chocolate, or champagne, they do not need it to operate. If anything, Coca-Cola, Entenmann’s cake or the makers of semiautomatic rifles detract from public safety and health.

A second argument is more promising. It focuses on the positive externalities of corporate action. The idea is this. Market societies inspire innovation, promote hard work, encourage development, and make possible a division of labor that contributes to a larger pot of resources and opportunities for all. This explains, in part, why the average person today enjoys amenities such as television, flush toilets, and air conditioning that kings and robber barons of yore could not have imagined.<sup>24</sup> The thought of making money animates people to develop new vaccines, television shows, tents, and tee shirts, expanding the goods and prospects to which we have access. By playing a part in the market, each of us contributes to this beneficial network of social interaction. This is the kind of thing Adam Smith had in mind when he wrote of a citizen,

He intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention... By pursu-

<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey Brennan and Loren Lomasky note this is the primary claim advanced in defense of a duty to vote (2000, p. 75). Klosko (1987) and other fairness theorists advance similar claims with regard to a duty to obey the law.

<sup>24</sup> Jason Brennan hints at this defense, writing that, “the division of labor tends to free people to do what they are good at, or, at least, to allow them to become good at doing something useful ... the overall effect of business activity... is to make the overwhelming majority of people vastly wealthier than they would otherwise have been” (2012, p. 320).



ing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it... It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages. (1917, p. 160)

This is, I think, the best case for the claim that for-profit businesses provide a fitting return to those who undertake burdensome political actions to the general good. For-profit labor expands the bundle of goods available to all (Brennan 2012, p. 319). In working as a janitor, electrician, or chef, buying coffee, canapes, or cars, consumers and workers in for-profit enterprises free others to do what they are good at, make possible productivity-enhancing specialization, and consequently improve everyone's well-being.

This is precisely what civically minded people are trying to do when they participate in politics. Those who go to the polls or volunteer for the military do work they have reason to believe enhances health, improves security, and increases wealth for all. The owners, managers, and employees of for-profit businesses do the same. In a well-functioning economy, they have every reason to believe their actions will magnify opportunities, promote prosperity, and so support public health and happiness among the community at large (Chetty et al. 2016; Hagerty and Veenhoven 2003).

### Proportionality

All this is true. Three cheers for markets. They play a significant part in lifting millions from poverty, in expanding real freedom, encouraging health, and adding value—and joy—to our lives.

This does not mean for-profit activities provide a fitting return to fellow citizens who take up burdensome political actions to our benefit. As we learned earlier, fittingness requires returns be *proportional* to the act for which reciprocity is due. This requires they satisfy the burden-based account.

The market account relies on the benefit-based account of proportionality we rejected earlier. Advocates contend that participants in for-profit business have paid their civic debts *because they have done enough to benefit their fellow citizens*. However, as we saw above, the reparations account of fittingness with its burden-based account of proportionality provides a more compelling account of what constitutes a fitting return. On that view, each of us must work to the benefit of our fellow citizens *until such point as further action would burden us more than the burden they took on for our benefit*.

For-profit activities fail this standard because the actors are already amply compensated.<sup>25</sup> Consider a military contractor in Afghanistan. At least given how our military is structured, contractors certainly help advance public safety (Zenko 2015). We have every reason to believe they do so deliberately. Working as a military contractor therefore satisfies the intent, content, and scope elements of fittingness. But contractors are amply rewarded for the work they do (Porter 2014). Consequently, their contributions—however, valuable—do not qualify as a fitting return for others' uncompensated public acts. They fail the proportionality criterion.

The same is true of other for-profit behaviors.<sup>26</sup> Stockbrokers, grocery store clerks, clothing designers, coffee shop owners, pharmacists, and florists all contribute to general well-being. However, they are repaid for the burdens involved in doing so. Not so those who provide a benefit by means of political participation. Voters do not get paid for heading to the polls.<sup>27</sup> Volunteers do not get rewarded for the rivers they clean. Taxpayers would certainly prefer others pay up in their place. Typical market behaviors thus lack the features required to qualify as fitting returns for these classic political acts. While deeply valuable, they are not ways of paying our civic debts.

To be clear, this does not mean for-profit activities have no effect on our civic debts. Such behaviors increase the good we can do, while lowering the cost. Those who develop and sell vaccines make it easier to promote health. Because of what they do, it is less burdensome to care for the sick. This reduces the debt we owe to those who shoulder the costs of enhancing public health. But that does not mean pharma-sales-people satisfy their obligations of reciprocity by going about their (well-paid) work.

### The Standard Account Reconsidered

Merely working in a for-profit corporation, it follows, does not discharge our civic debts. So much for the market account.

However, this does not support the standard account according to which we can pay these debts only through political participation. Neither view, it turns out, accurately captures the relationship between for-profit businesses and the moral duties of reciprocity we acquire as citizens.

<sup>25</sup> At least in expectation.

<sup>26</sup> And indeed, many non-profit ventures.

<sup>27</sup> When they do—as for example professional lobbyists—we typically do not think their behavior generates or pays civic debts.

## The Limits of Political Activity

The standard account holds citizens have civic debts they can pay only by voting, serving in the military, or undertaking other traditional political behaviors. Something like this view underlies a range of claims in contemporary political philosophy, most prominently the contention that citizens have a duty of fairness to obey the law (Klosko 2004).

The now-discredited market account called into question whether citizens *must* act politically to satisfy these debts. It left undisturbed the claim that political participation *can* satisfy these obligations, or that others' political actions generate duties of reciprocity. Our analysis of fittingness complicates both contentions.

The discussion of Pollyanna and Katrin reminded us that actions impose different costs on different actors. Riding a rollercoaster is a burden for those who fear heights—and a joy for thrill seekers. Politics is no different. Some people are bored by door-knocking for campaigns, anxious at the thought of understanding policy, or terrified of serving in the military. Other people have a very different experience. They like staying abreast of political news. Knowing how to vote well—and taking the time to do so—is, for them, a pleasure. Indeed, many scholars suggest such enjoyment is a significant determinant of political participation (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, p. 184.; Luskin 1990).

As we saw earlier, acts generate demands for reciprocity if they intentionally work toward benefits to others at a cost to the benefactor. In turn, actions reciprocate a good done if they satisfy the reparations account of fittingness, that is if they intentionally seek to advance the interest of the benefactor proportionally, that is, until further actions would come at a greater cost than what the original benefactor herself took on for the recipient's benefit.

For those who greatly enjoy politics, there would seem to be no cost to participation. The same is true of those whose engagement comes with extensive reward. Barack Obama's political participation was heavily remunerated. Because of it, he enjoys acclaim—and financial reward—he would never have otherwise experienced.

When engagement is beneficial, the reparations account entails that participants cannot demand reciprocity.<sup>28</sup> The standard view therefore over-counts some citizens' claims. Those for whom free-riding would prove costly have no grounds for arguing others are in their debt.

The same is true when it comes to providing a fair return. Those benefited by political participation cannot say their mere involvement provides a fitting return to those for whom involvement is burdensome. Their behavior fails the

proportionality standard. This is an ordinary intuition. We do not think a politician's photo op at the polls carries the same moral weight as a single mother working three jobs who loses money to vote.

This does not mean political engagement *cannot* pay the civic debts of those who enjoy politics, or that such individuals must perversely take up the few such actions they dislike. As our discussion of the congenitally cheerful revealed, even things we enjoy become burdensome as the obligations to undertake them aggregate. Like a billionaire paying taxes, those who enjoy political participation must simply do more.

## The Role of For-Profit Business Revisited

The standard account contends citizens can satisfy their duties of reciprocity only by participating in politics. Against this claim, the market account held we need merely show up for work. We have now seen that is not the case. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that the standard account is correct. What I have shown is that *ordinary* market behaviors are not fitting returns for the burdensome political work others do toward our benefit. It does not follow citizens can *only* pay their civic debts by acting politically.

Quite the opposite is true. *Some* business activities qualify as fitting returns. Consider Jonas Salk, who developed the earliest polio vaccine. Famously, when asked, "Who owns the patent on this vaccine?" Salk replied, "Well, the people I would say" (Johnson 1990). According to myth, Salk gave up profits on the vaccine to advance public health. Unlike the ordinary manufacture and sale of goods and services, such an act satisfies the intent, scope, content, *and* proportionality requirements.

The actual story of Jonas Salk is more complicated. It is not clear the real Salk faced a cost—both because he was not legally permitted to profit from the vaccine, and because he was amply compensated with a lifetime of public acclaim.<sup>29</sup> But the case nonetheless proves illustrative. There are choices we can make in our work lives that promote the public good at a predictable cost to our interest. These qualify as fitting returns.

We have every reason to think people make such choices all the time. Individuals routinely forgo lucrative careers to take up work they believe promotes the public good.<sup>30</sup> They choose, as did many of my law school colleagues, to provide legal services in underserved areas, or take policy positions, rather than higher paying jobs at corporate firms. As did a

<sup>28</sup> Such that a participant would prefer engagement to free-riding even absent moral considerations.

<sup>29</sup> Salk's research was funded by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis which did not permit researchers rights and royalties for discoveries (Johnson 1990).

<sup>30</sup> Even Senator McCain praised his rival then Senator Barack Obama for choosing to forgo a lucrative job to work as a community organizer in Chicago (Loven and Pickler 2008).

good friend of mine, they give up financially advantageous positions at hedge funds to work for generic drug companies on the view that making cheap drugs widely available is an important contribution to public health. The decisions we make in our paid careers can involve burdens we accept at least in part because we believe they contribute to the well-being of our community.

Choice of employment is far from the only act that can play this role. Companies can implement discretionary self-regulation when they recognize existing standards are not up to the task of securing public goods. They can voluntarily work with regulators, pointing out weaknesses from which they might otherwise benefit, providing information or expertise with an eye to the public good in ways that extend beyond their legal obligations. They can actively lobby for socially valuable causes in ways that do not operate to their direct benefit (Wettstein and Baur 2016). They can take on some of the work of providing goods such as health care and education when public provisions fail (Valente and Crane 2010). This is consistent with recent moves in business ethics to characterize corporate social responsibility as a political phenomenon (Baur and Schmitz 2011).

Consumers can also make choices that promote the public good at a cost. They can, for example, select to acquire more expensive products over cheaper alternatives to promote socially productive outcomes, or encourage the kind of pro-social behavior described above. Indeed, research shows such market sanctions play an important role in inducing firms to operate in a socially responsible manner (Newell 2008). These behaviors satisfy the proportionality standard. Though not traditionally classified as political, such acts can discharge obligations of civic reciprocity.

Both the market and standard accounts thus prove mistaken. Neither accurately describes the relationship between for-profit business and civic debt. The market account wrongly assumes the fact that businesses promote the common good means for-profit behaviors automatically pay citizens' debts. They do not. But the standard account mistakenly presumes only political actions can repay political acts. That too is false. Business activities that incur uncompensated burdens in the promotion of the public good qualify as fitting returns just as much as their non-market counterparts. While the market account gave our business lives too much credit, the standard account gives it too little.

## A New Theory of Reciprocal Citizenship

This suggests the need for a more nuanced approach to civic duties of reciprocity, one that rejects the sweeping conclusions of both the market and standard accounts. Call this:

*The Civic Works Account of Reciprocal Citizenship:*

1. Citizens have civic debts, duties of reciprocity owed to co-nationals who work to the citizens' benefit by undertaking *civic works*—burdensome efforts for the public good, which can include traditional political acts and certain actions they perform in their relationships to for-profit businesses (among other things).
2. They can repay these debts by taking up a proportional share of civic works.

This view has several advantages. First, it captures the moral significance of differential burdens. A billionaire giving you fifty cents is quite different than a person down to their last dollar doing the same. As it stands, neither the market nor the standard account makes this distinction. The standard view holds people should undertake the same actions as their fellow citizens. It does not consider that assisting at the polls is more difficult for a working single-parent than a wealthy retiree. The market account says people reciprocate political actions with ordinary for-profit jobs. It suggests that Chris Harrison making hundreds of thousands of dollars hosting *The Bachelorette* is being just as good a citizen as a poorly paid day-care provider who spends her free hours volunteering to help others pass the naturalization test.

By contrast, the civic works account recognizes that it matters morally when an act costs a person more. Rather than telling people they should undertake a specific act (voting, serving in the military) or add a certain amount of value (whether it benefits or burdens them) it holds that citizens should work to their benefactors' benefit until doing more comes at too great a cost *for them*. What actions qualify depends on individual circumstances. Campaigning is no burden to me—quite the opposite—but it might be quite different for you and different altogether for a minimum wage worker supporting a family.

Second, the civic works account acknowledges the whole breadth of activities that contribute to the public good. The standard account focuses on an (often poorly delineated) category of traditional political and civic acts. The market account adds the work of for-profit businesses. Neither appreciates that activities beyond classically recognized political acts *and* profit-making ventures contribute to the public good. For example, a person who chooses to teach elementary school over more acclaimed career choices or who resigns in protest from a corporate board may do work to the public good at personal cost. The civic works account makes no category-based assumptions about the *kinds* of actions that pay our civic debts. It asks us to turn to the data.

For these reasons, both the standard and market approaches miscalculate the moral standing of our fellow citizens. The standard view both over- and under-credits the politically engaged. It praises those who enjoy political participation even when they take on no burden, and gives the

same weight to similar deeds by those for whom such activities are difficult. It grants no recognition at all to publically beneficial choice outside of the traditional political realm. The market view over-counts the efforts of well-remunerated for-profit actors and—in its value-added approach to proportionality—unduly discounts the work of disabled, impoverished, and otherwise challenged citizens.

By comparison, the civic works account credits citizens for all the publically valuable labor they do. It acknowledges that actions weigh differently on differently situated people, and allots standing accordingly. It thus gives praise and blame where they are due.

We should be careful to distinguish three concerns that might cause confusion. First, merely involving some cost does not ensure a behavior qualifies as civic work. Many financial losses, for example, are rewarded in other forms. Supreme Court Justices, for instance, earn lower wages than they would in the private sector.<sup>31</sup> However, they are amply compensated with public esteem, interesting work, and life tenure.<sup>32</sup> Their career choices thus do not qualify as fitting returns, however, much good they do.

Second, claiming to involve a costly benefit is not sufficient to qualify a behavior as civic work. Many actions that purport to do so do not. For example, many companies self-regulate instrumentally, to avert more strenuous government scrutiny (Williams et al. 2017). Far from advancing the public good at a cost, these behaviors benefit the company compared to the expected alternative. Similarly, many behaviors that fly under the banner of corporate social responsibility are just marketing techniques, expected to enhance profit by promoting a good image (Kiessling et al. 2016). Nevertheless, market behaviors can qualify as genuine civic works—and many do (Wettstein and Baur 2016).

Finally, it is important to note that my work here says nothing about stockholder theory or its various opponents. What I have shown is that it is possible for individuals to satisfy their obligations of civic reciprocity by acting in their for-profit lives. That does not tell us whether they are justified in doing so. There may be other ethical considerations that override, promises they have made or resources they have no right to employ in this manner. But that is a quite different discussion, one that does not bear directly on our conversation.

<sup>31</sup> The salary for an associate Supreme Court Justices in 2014 was \$244,400. Equity partners in a law firm listed in the American Law top 100 earn an average of about \$896,000 a year. Justices, of course, receive salary and benefits for life and can earn more from books or speaking engagements. Nonetheless, their financial prospects would be higher in the private sector (Lat 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Consider the justices could retire at any moment and reap these financial rewards, and do not do so.

## Conclusion

A long tradition in philosophy suggests that reciprocity to fellow citizens requires each of us act politically. In recent years, a novel set of pro-market scholars have attacked this tradition, contending that normal business activities are as capable of paying our civic debts. In this paper, I have argued that both accounts are false. Good citizenship requires more than manufacturing, buying and selling goods at personal profit. If Indra Nooyi does nothing at Pepsi but help produce products consumers enjoy, she would be a wonderful CEO and a source of great value in this world. That would not satisfy her duties of reciprocity. But it is equally wrong to presume—as philosophers typically have—that good citizenship always requires political participation. Our roles as employers, employees, and consumers also afford opportunities to repay our fellow citizens for the burdensome political—and non-political—works they do to our benefit.

This discovery raises as many questions as it answers. What behaviors qualify as civic works? How much work must citizens take on to satisfy their obligations of reciprocity? Are all civic works commensurable with all others? Does it follow that citizens can trade off traditional civic acts like paying taxes against newly recognized works like industry self-regulation or career choice? This article is far too short to provide answers.

However, recognizing these questions represents a step forward. Both traditional and newer ways of thinking about civic reciprocity obscure such concerns. In doing so, they present a misleading picture of good citizenship, one that falsely leads us to judge members of our community as virtuous or failing citizens. By pointing the way to a new research agenda, the civic works account makes possible the development of an account of good citizenship that speaks to the actual conditions of our lives, one that recognizes the important role for businesses play in building a flourishing community, but does not ignore the heavy burdens many take on to make such a community possible.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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