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Thank You?

“Thank you.” “Thank you!” “Thanks.” *Silence*. Is there a correct response? Is there a moral response? Is it moral to say thank you, or rather is it immoral if one does not say it? People often say “thank you” as a response to others when others do something for them. This has been a practice for as long as I can remember, taught to me because it was deemed the polite, right thing to do. Recently, most likely due to my philosophical ethics course, I have been thinking about the practice of saying thank you, what it means, and if it is indeed moral. There are factors and layers to the act that I have considered while trying to reach my answer. Factors include: why thank you is said; who is saying it, and how their upbringing or background may influence saying it; when one says it; when one does not say it; and the response to one who does not say it from another who either does or does not expect the thank you. I will take the example of one, A, holding the door open for another, B, to further explain because this is a common event that can apply to nearly everyone, if not all.

A holds door open for B, and B says, “thank you.” Why does B say thank you? As mentioned, the reason I say thank you in this situation is because I was taught that it is the right thing to do. There are two considerations to this reason. Who has deemed it the right thing to do, and why have they deemed it so? In my case, which I am sure applies to many others, my parents are the ones who taught me that it is the right thing to do. Why do parents teach that it is the right thing to do? Is it because their parents taught them this same lesson that has been passed down for generations? If so, where did it originally come from for it to be deemed a right thing to do? Was it learned from the societies and communities from which they have lived in? Well, then the next question is where did they come from, and how much of the culture from which they came has inspired it? Is it a universal acceptance to say it because it is the right thing if it was taught and learned in many different cultures because of this reason? If so, it does not necessarily mean

it is moral. Cultures can alter the perspective on saying thank you being the right thing to do to something entirely different. And if this new thing that is no longer saying thank you is deemed the right thing to do, then does that strip away the morality of saying thank you?

Let's say B says thank you because B gained something from A holding the door open. A made B's day better. A made B more happy. A saved B energy. Because what can be gained can be qualified in many different ways, let's use the term "pleasure" for what is gained. A holds door open for B, and B says, "thank you" because B gained pleasure from the event. Should saying thank you be said because more pleasure has been achieved? In an obvious note, utilitarians are screaming "yes!" at this, but the utilitarian perspective is worth taking seriously in more ways than one. B gained pleasure from A. Why would it not be moral to be grateful for gaining pleasure and showing it with a simple two words? Rather, the morality question would lie in why would one who gained pleasure from someone else not say thank you. If A does not care, then there is no issue, and they can be on their merry way. Let's change the conditions a bit while keeping the utilitarian perspective.

So far, the example has been under the assumption that A has no preference, care, or opinion to if B says thank you or not. A holds door open for B. B gains pleasure from it, but does not say thank you. A has no care toward not receiving a thank you. Utilitarian believer says that is moral because net pleasure is positive. Now, A cares. A is no longer a robot, but rather a person that has a view on saying and receiving a thank you like many of us in this situation. A holds door open for B. B does not say thank you and gains pleasure from doing so. A loses pleasure in some way due to this. What is the consensus here? The utilitarian can play the net pleasure game to see what is right or not, and then call saying thank you moral an "it depends".

However, taking a step back from theories, what about the conclusion for if A or B should get into a conversation, argument, or debate on if thank you should be said? A can lose pleasure from not receiving the thank you because they believe it is the right thing for B to do. A can lose pleasure because they typically gain pleasure from receiving it. This pleasure expected if gained, or lack of pleasure if not, from the event can lead to other events that can give or take away pleasure from others. These consequences can be considered too on if it is moral. If the pleasure expected is great enough, it can lead to something being said to B which causes an argument. B can not say thank you due to not believing it is necessary, resulting in B not believing it is the right thing to do. B can not say thank you because B does not gain pleasure from saying it, or somehow gains pleasure in not saying it. Lastly, B can not say thank you because B did not ask A to hold the door open for B. This brings a new reason for saying thank you or not saying thank you, and I believe it to be the most modern, controversial one that is worth considering on if it is moral: should thank you only be said if a request is fulfilled.

This reason is the consideration I have come to that has ultimately recently started getting my gears turning on if saying thank you is moral. Sure, if it is the right thing to do, then it is moral. Sure, if it brings more pleasure to people, then it is moral. If A or B chooses the immoral action because of these reasons, then they are immoral. But what if the thank you is not said because nothing was asked for? Then, the control is in both parties, and both can choose on what is moral or not in the situation for themselves. If A does not hold the door open for B because B did not ask for it, then A does not expect B to say thank you if A actually did hold the door open for B, resulting in no need to consider morality. If B does not ask for A to hold the door open for B, then B does not have to say thank you to A, resulting in no need to consider morality. However, in order for this control to be attained, the parties have to expect nothing from the

other, and this is where I spin back to square one. Do I really want to be in a world where it is not expected to say thank you because it is not expected that someone else does something for me? Do I really want to be in a world where people stop doing nice things for another and show gratitude by just saying thank you? Whether I want it or not, it is unfortunately an actual possibility should the extreme of the whole world adapting this mindset actually become reality.