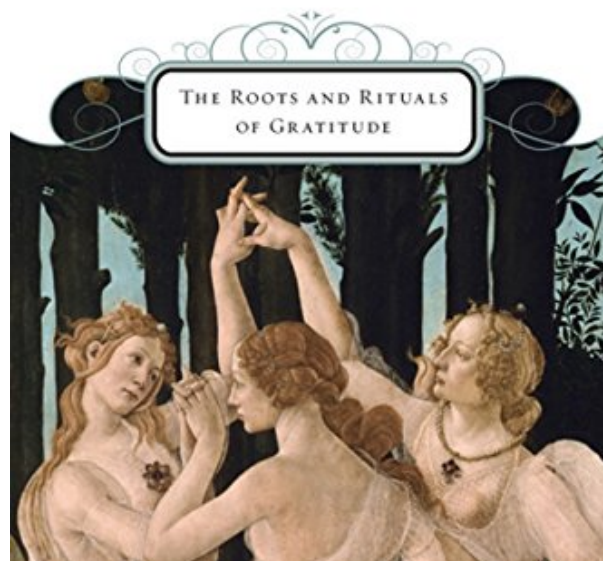


# THE GIFT OF THANKS: THE ROOTS AND RITUALS OF GRATITUDE BY MARGARET VISSER

AUTHOR OF *The Rituals of Dinner*  
— MARGARET VISSER —

## *The Gift of* THANKS



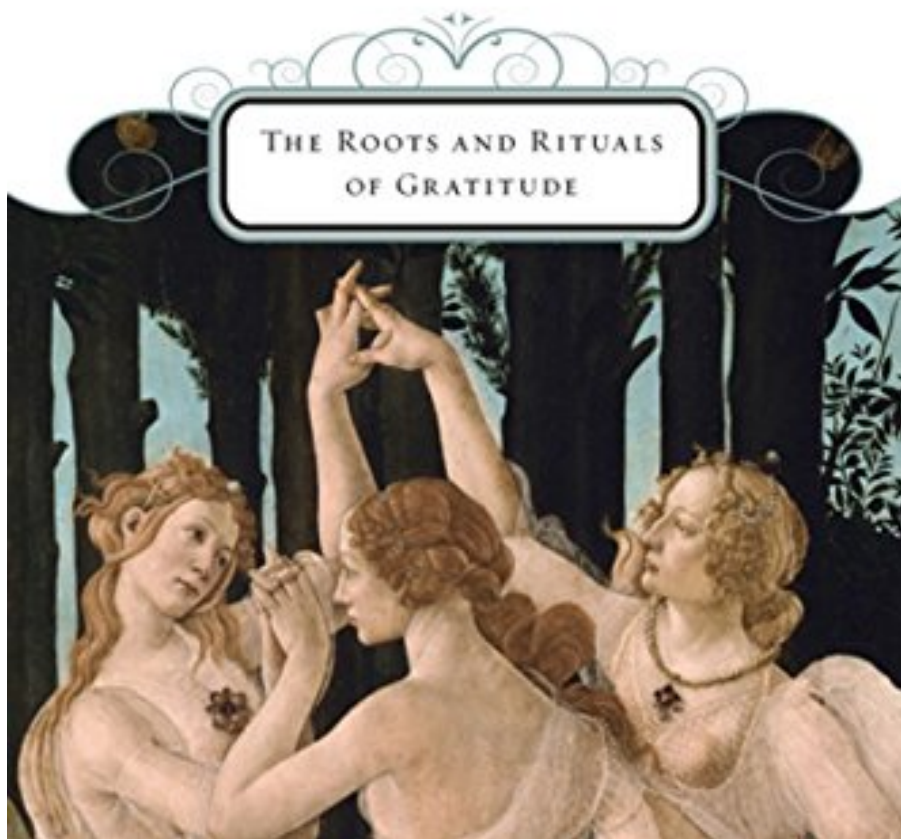
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From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Like a modern Ruth Benedict immersed in classical literature, Visser (*Much Depends on Dinner*) examines what it really means, in the course of human interaction, to be thankful. Her kindly book turns on itself in an exhaustive but continually engrossing fashion. Beginning with the assumption that [g]ratitude must be freely given; otherwise, it might be a polite show, but it is not gratitude, Visser asks many questions of cultures East and West and provides a plethora of answers. The obscured and deeper meaning of giving thanks is probed through such divergent cultural markers as the work of Georg Simmel and Dickens; the Bible and Proust; Japanese sumimasen, which is both a thanking and an apologizing, and C.C. Baxter in Bill Wilder's *The Apartment*; Plato's *Laws* and Seneca's massive treatise on gift giving and the slipperiness of saying you're welcome in today's U.K. What is tipping all about? What is the etymological relationship between votive, vow, favors, grace and gratitude? What might the gestures of courtesy—the curtsy for example—be? Overall, this is a delightful and graceful gift of a book, for which any fortunate recipient will be thankful. (Nov. 19)

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Known as an 'anthropologist of everyday life,' Margaret Visser has, in five award-winning books, uncovered and illuminated the intriguing and unexpected meanings of everyday objects and habits. Now she turns her keen eye to another custom so frequently encountered that it often escapes notice: saying 'Thank you.' What do we really mean by these two simple words?

This fascinating inquiry into all aspects of gratitude ranges from the unusual determination with which parents teach their children to thank, to the difference between speaking the words and feeling them, to the ways different cultures handle the complex matters of giving, receiving, and returning favors and presents. Visser illuminates the fundamental opposition in our own culture between gift-giving and commodity exchange, and the similarities between gratitude and its opposite, vengefulness. *The Gift of Thanks* considers cultural history, including the modern battle of social scientists to pin down the notion of thankfulness and account for it, and the newly awakened scientific interest in the biological and evolutionary roots of emotions.

With her engaging combination of curiosity and erudition, Visser once again reveals the extraordinary in the everyday.

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#### About the Author

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Extremely insightful and thought-provoking

By It's SEPtember!

I enjoyed this book very much, and it really opened my eyes to what was 'behind' everyday expressions like "Thank you" or "Thanks". We use those words without even thinking about it, but according to the author, they are essential to the fabric of society. This was a very intellectual, yet approachable, look across time and cultures at the origins of the sentiment of gratitude, of appreciation, and of memory; and how important all those are in interpersonal and intersocietal relationships. I have to say I particularly liked the discussions about the symbolism and purpose of wrapping a gift, and how in Japan, people will say "I am sorry" where we would say "Thank you" - it really gives you a look inside your cultural norms.

This was a very long book - it took me almost a month to read, and normally I would just dive right into a book like this. However, I had to stop a couple times during that time and read something 'lighter'. Not because this was a difficult or hard-to-follow book - it was very accessible and well-written - but it was 'heavy' in the intellectual sense of the word. A lot of thought went into the writing, and I guess I was trying to show my gratitude to the author for her work and insights by giving what she has to say my full attention. (See! She corrupted me - I'm thinking in terms of 'The Gift'!!!)

Highly recommended for anyone who is interested in the sociological aspects of gratitude or gift-giving, or who just finds the concept intriguing. Be warned, this book requires work, but it's worth it! The Kindle edition has over 7000 locations, which probably translates to 400-500 pages in a paper edition.

Note on Kindle formatting: Very good. There were instances of two words being run together scattered throughout, but they were sporadic. Those were the only formatting errors I noticed and they did not impact reading.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

thanks but no thanks

By diogenes

Unfocused and superficial. Would not recommend. Best part of the book is the dust jacket Botticelli painting Visser shows the difficulty of attempting to hunt with the hounds and run with the hares which seems to be the task of the self-made cultural anthropologist.

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