


# Old Testament hospitality as reciprocity, Adam Smith and business ethics

**Author:**Mark Rathbone<sup>1</sup> **Affiliation:**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Management, Faculty of Economic and Management Science, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

**Corresponding author:**

Mark Rathbone,  
mark.rathbone@nwu.ac.za

**Dates:**

Received: 10 Apr. 2024

Accepted: 25 June 2024

Published: 23 July 2024

**How to cite this article:**

Rathbone, M., 2024, 'Old Testament hospitality as reciprocity, Adam Smith and business ethics', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 80(1), a9848. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9848>

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This article aims to underscore the progression of Old Testament hospitality as reciprocity for moral guidance and, specifically, business ethics in contemporary society. The study follows a comparative analysis of Old Testament hospitality and reciprocity in the work of Adam Smith that emphasises the role of mutual relations and voluntary exchange. It will be argued that reciprocity associated with hospitality in the Old Testament is an important principle that further developed in classic economics and provides ethical principles for contemporary large-scale, multi-cultural and multi-faith societies, although different from the small-scale societies of the Old Testament world. The interface of mutual relations and voluntary exchange in Old Testament hospitality and reciprocity in Smith unveils important ethical principles for contemporary business ethics regarding responsibility and accountability.

**Contribution:** The comparative analysis of Old Testament hospitality and reciprocity in Adam Smith's work provides ethical principles based on mutual relations and voluntary exchange for contemporary, multi-cultural and multi-faith society, specifically in business ethics.

**Keywords:** Old Testament; hospitality; reciprocity; Adam Smith; business ethics.

## Introduction

A message on the automated teller machine (ATM) of a well-known financial institution warns the user *never to accept help from strangers*. This is an ominous message and a sign of the times when the help of others may be to a person's detriment, for instance, when a person's personal identification number (PIN) or password may be compromised, resulting in financial losses. This warning is important because of many cases of fraud and theft, but it begs the question of how this aligns with the ethics of hospitality and rampant xenophobia that flares up from time to time. Are incidents of xenophobia not a sign that our fear of strangers has reached pathological forms and we have become apathetic to the plight of others? The importance of ethical guidance in contemporary multi-cultural and multi-faith society is critical, and it is important that biblical scholars engage with these issues to provide guidance for society and, specifically, modern business. Melé and Fontrodona (2017) state that applying Christian ethics to business can be traced back to the 13th century, but application to modern business is relatively recent. Unfortunately, Hobbs (2001) warns that the need for biblical ethics can also anachronistically influence scholarship and result in distorted views of the Old Testament world. He notes that hospitality in the Old Testament differs from contemporary views of hospitality, including the other as an inclusive group of marginalised, oppressed and unknown people. Furthermore, it did not include unknown strangers and benefited the host as a function of honour. According to Hobbs (2001):

[H]ospitality in the Old Testament is for small-scale societies that cannot be equated to larger contemporary commercial societies – this leads to the teleological fallacy, which is 'the tendency to use ancient documents as a springboard for a modern polemic'. (p. 5)

Martin (2014) concurs with Hobbs and seeks to provide theological principles for interfaith dialogue from the perspective of hospitality. Martin's solution is a step in the right direction, but it is limited as a perspective for faith-based people, and not for the non-faith-based. In addition, the problem with Hobbs's argument is that the importance of hospitality for contemporary society does not come to fruition, specifically in terms of the reciprocal nature of Old Testament hospitality that is underscored by Hobbs (2001), Martin (2014), Silberbauer (1993), Herzfeld (1991) and others. I will argue that hospitality as reciprocity rooted in the Ancient Near East (ANE) culture offers a novel perspective on Old Testament ethics that is relevant to contemporary society while not following a teleological argument, for example using ancient texts to address contemporary issues. The teleological fallacy is averted by following the progression of reciprocity in the Old Testament compared to developments in classic economics and explicating its relevance for

contemporary business ethics. Today, reciprocity, among others, highlights questions regarding responsible and accountable engagement between host and guest, which have many applications in commerce and labour.

Hospitality, from the perspective of Old Testament ethics, can contribute to contemporary business ethics because the reciprocal relationship between host and guest contains similar dynamics as those associated with the economics of Adam Smith and is based on reciprocal mutual relationships and voluntary exchange of human interactions. Therefore, a comparative analysis of Old Testament hospitality and reciprocity in the work of Smith will raise ethical principles for contemporary society, specifically business ethics. Smith's view of reciprocity is addressed in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), an important ethical perspective for commerce without succumbing to a teleological fallacy. Smith's inclusion of unknown strangers is the only aspect that differs from Old Testament hospitality. This is a more difficult situation because strangers do not have knowledge of each other. Consequently, this is Smith's strength rather than a weakness for contemporary society. The benefit of the Old Testament hospitality ethics as reciprocity for business ethics is that it includes believers and non-believers who are part of commercial society, whether labourers, entrepreneurs or business owners. Old Testament ethics of hospitality represent it as a resource for moral guidance of practical everyday engagement based on the notion of responsibility and accountability in reciprocal relations.

Business ethics can be understood from three different, but overlapping perspectives: ethics-in-business, academic business ethics, and institutional business ethics (De George 2012). It is from the perspective of ethics-in-business and academic business ethics – with its philosophical-ethical and faith-based ethics – that Old Testament hospitality is relevant. Research on Smith and business ethics has also proliferated (Gonin 2015, Wells 2014), providing moral guidance from within economics and in dialogue with Old Testament hospitality on reciprocity. Friedman (2000:43) underscores the diverse contribution of the Old Testament to business ethics that include ecology, economic justice, labour relations, fair trade and so forth.

Firstly, this article will discuss Hobbs and Martin's criticism of the teleological or anachronistic use of the Old Testament, which imposes contemporary issues foreign to the Old Testament hospitality and its cultural world. Secondly, the importance of reciprocity in Old Testament hospitality as a function of mutual relations and voluntary exchange will be explained. Thirdly, in comparison to Old Testament hospitality, reciprocal exchange in Adam Smith will be discussed to understand the implication of reciprocity for business ethics without succumbing to a teleological fallacy. Finally, the implications for mutual exchange and reciprocity for business ethics are discussed in terms of responsible and accountable business practices.

## Old Testament hospitality and the teleological fallacy

Janzen (1994:43), in the book *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach*, notes that hospitality in the Old Testament differed significantly from the modern hospitality industry and tourism, but it does embrace the 'biblical equivalent to our policies regarding refugees, immigrants and welfare'. Although Old Testament hospitality cannot be equated to modern tourism, it is relevant for socio-ethical and other justice issues. Janzen's (1994:53) view of hospitality is inclusive, transcends the boundaries of an in-group and extends to the other. He argues that hospitality is always 'ready to embrace the stranger, and thereby extend one's own horizon'. It is an important aspect of ANE cultural life that is directed to the other and theologically underpinned by the fact that Israelites were strangers and sojourners with God. Janzen (1994:43), therefore, concurs with Ogletree (1985) that Old Testament hospitality can provide ethical guidance for contemporary issues relating to the other that is all-encompassing and directed to all people in need of any type of assistance, and it includes 'refugees, immigrants and welfare'. Alternatively, Hobbs (2001:5) argues that Janzen's statement contains two aspects that make it susceptible to a teleological fallacy: firstly, generalising the idea of travel and being a stranger away from your home for some reason, and secondly, the jump to connect it to modern ethical issues.

This implies that an ancient text such as the Old Testament is erroneously used as a reference for contemporary issues – a practice that neglects the fact that meaning is not universal across cultures. Comparisons between cultures cannot be generalised, and they must include a deep analysis of the symbolic universe and hospitality in a small-scale society. Hobbs (2001:8) notes that in 'small-scale societies, morality functions more as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself'. In other words, a functional aspect of hospitality has practical implications for life in the ANE.

Hobbs underscores that small-scale societies differ from contemporary larger societies, which is an obvious fact that not many people will dispute. Hobbs (2001) affirms that the functionality of hospitality in the Old Testament was:

[T]he act of giving food, shelter and protection (Gn 19) to one who, though from the wider community, is not a member of one's *immediate* household. It involved the protection of the guest while he was under one's roof. (p. 29)

The functional nature of hospitality is not about being kind to strangers or philanthropic in the contemporary sense because the 'social script' differs and involves the culture of honour and shame. It is about functional and reciprocal relations, although Hobbs does not develop this element further. Any other interpretation that is infused with contemporary cultural knowledge succumbs to the teleological fallacy.

Another important difference between hospitality in the ANE and today is that it excluded foreigners [*nokri*] and only

provided limited hospitality in terms of time and content. The stranger [*ger*] in Hebrew is not someone unknown but can be a neighbour or someone known because of their permanent or temporary residential status (Clines 2009:70). The law protects the stranger, who does not have to worship Yahweh but who must comply with the law (Nm 9:14, Dt 1:16). On the other hand, *nokri* or foreigners are viewed as unclean and non-Israelite, which poses a threat. Israelites had to avoid foreigners, and marriage with foreigners was prohibited because of the possibility of worshipping their gods. Martin (2014) also points out that foreigners were excluded and that hospitality, therefore, cannot denote contemporary hospitality to marginalised groups or refugees:

[T]he customs of hospitality as support for justice on behalf of the poor, immigrants and other marginalised groups, groups that might correspond to the biblical 'stranger' (*ger*) or 'foreigner' (*nokri*). But whilst demands for justice are abundant in the Old Testament, hospitality is something else entirely. Old Testament hospitality, therefore, must not be equated with social justice. (p. 3)

The difference between the world of the ANE and the contemporary world is a historical fact. Still, the question is, in what way can Old Testament hospitality be informative for contemporary ethical dilemmas and business ethics specifically? Hobbs's assessment of contemporary society suggests that ethical guidance is needed because of the influence of consumerism and other problems. Hobbs (2001:8) states that '[In] Western society meals are "vulgarized", that is, meals are made common and without social meaning except to stress the individual's taste. The consumer is in control'. Additionally, Hobbs (2001) analyses contemporary hospitality as an extension of consumerism:

... important aspect of meal-eating in Western society is that it is inseparably linked with consumerism. 'Consumer' is used with reference to both eating and buying. Meals and hospitality, with the growth of what has come to be known as the 'hospitality industry' based on high rates of mobility for the average member of society, are now inseparably linked with commercialization. (p. 8)

These comments highlight problems facing contemporary commercial society; but can Old Testament hospitality provide guidance for believers and non-believers? Further, the comment does not appreciate important responsible business practices and the many dimensions of contemporary cuisine, such as the artful preparation of food that creates new public social spaces beyond the home. It seems that it is problematic for Hobbs that 'meal-eating' is linked to consumerism in a contemporary commercial society. Consumerism and commercialisation may be the reason why Janzen also dismissed the hospitality industry as a contemporary expression of hospitality. This dismissal of the relevance of hospitality and business, however, removes the Old Testament and hospitality as a meaningful moral guide for today and specifically for business ethics.

Martin (2014:1) proposes a 'revised Christian practice of hospitality' that includes theological themes such as human unity, relationality, interdependence and mutual existence to

bridge the division between the Old Testament world and contemporary society. His solution to the teleological fallacy contains important theological principles for contemporary society to find solutions to contemporary issues together. However, the problem is that it excludes hospitality beyond the multi-faith environment. This limits Old Testament hospitality as an important moral guide for secular commercial society. In addition, it is an attempt to systematise hospitality without engaging the meaningful nature of Old Testament hospitality as the reciprocity to which he refers. I, therefore, argue that the ANE view of hospitality as reciprocity can be valuable as a principle that can be applied across cultures and contexts regarding meaningful ethics for contemporary society and business ethics.

## Old Testament hospitality as reciprocity

An important aspect of hospitality that Hobbs underscores is reciprocity – an aspect also supported by many scholars, as suggested earlier. Unfortunately, Hobbs does not develop it further in terms of the principles encapsulated in it for contemporary ethics. According to these perspectives, hospitality was based on a reciprocal cultural pretext that secured honour for the host. In Genesis 18:2–3, Abraham extends a solemn invitation to his potential guests and pleads that they do not decline his request. This is similar to the invitation extended by Lot, and even after being rejected, insists that the men accept his invitation which they then do (Gn 19:1–3). Further, the host may also benefit from some future benefits. Abraham and Sarah received a blessing (Gn 18:10); but on another occasion, it could also be the promise of accommodation for the host when travelling to the land of the guest. Rahab provided hospitality to the Israelite spies in return for the future protection of her family (Jos 2:12–13). I will argue that this aspect is crucial for the functioning of hospitality in the Old Testament, and it is an important principle for contemporary business ethics, specifically regarding mutual relations and voluntary exchange of hospitality found in the work of Adam Smith.

Reynolds (2006) underscores that the functionality of hospitality in terms of reciprocal mutual relations was part and parcel of daily life in the ANE to provide shelter as part of the economy of exchange, although not in terms of monetary compensation for the host but rather as justice and ethic of reciprocity:

Especially in a nomadic context, anyone could find herself or himself a stranger in one circumstance or another. This ethic of exchange insinuates that human beings share a baseline dignity that is vulnerable and can be imperilled when exposed, fostering a dependence upon the generosity of others. Justice requires an economy of compassionate reciprocity that welcomes the vulnerable stranger. (p. 196)

Martin (2014:7) agrees with the importance of mutual dependency between people in the ANE. He highlights the necessity of people taking the needs of widows, orphans and other vulnerable people into account. Mutual support is



specifically important in small-scale societies, as we find in the Old Testament world. Silberbauer (1993:18) investigated hospitality in these societies and identified mutual relations in hospitality as a form of reciprocity. It was found that hospitality was embedded in mutual relations symbolised by an economy of gift-giving and reciprocity. This resonates with Marcel Mauss's (1966) studies on gifts and potlatch in archaic societies. According to Mauss (1966:11), the cultural significance of gifts was associated with a system of recognition, traditions and power. In other words, gifting is supported by structures that denote symbolic influence, in which the person giving a gift displays their wealth. At the same time, the recipients incur debt, which is usually reciprocated by submission or means other than financial because of the disparity of wealth between the giver and receiver. The structure of this process is supported by traditions, culture and religious-ethical principles (Mauss 1966:37–41). The initial act of generosity, therefore, comes with explicit and controlled conditions that must be respected and reciprocated, with detrimental consequences in cases of non-compliance. Furthermore, the refusal of gifts from someone in power may even incur hostility.

Hospitality underscores the reciprocity between the host and guest, although the gift of hospitality cannot be immediately repaid. Reynolds (2006:197) emphasises that the 'stranger has inherent value as a human being precisely in his or her dependence, lacking the ability to reciprocate in kind'. However, the value and dignity of the guest as the recipient of the host's charity illustrates the host's honour and the guest's duty to reciprocate by displays of respect honouring for the host, specifically if an important person accepts an invitation which does not have immediate material benefit. Consequently, although the guest cannot match the charity of the host, the display of hospitality by the host and the mutual relation that is forged extend the honour and the reputation of the host. Herzfeld (1991) explains:

The point is precisely that the visitor is not at home, but is indeed highly dependent upon his host. For many ... the height of *eghōismos*, self-regard, is a lavish display of hospitality since it speaks volumes about the social importance of the actor. (p. 36)

Reciprocity underscores the deep symbolic meaning of hospitality for the host, but the guest also has a duty to honour the host and possibly assist the host in the future. Herzfeld (1991:51,81) notes that a guest can also subordinate a powerful person, especially in public places, whereas hospitality in a household signifies the moral superiority of the host. A guest may also insult or embarrass the honour of a host by refusing an invitation, acting hostile or usurping the host, among others (Hobbs 2001:11). Hobbs (2001:17) explains that through hospitality, the host extends '... his circle of kin and friends, gains in honour by providing' a place for the displaced traveller. These aspects emphasise the complexity of hospitality as a symbolic phenomenon in terms of exchange, influence and power. The exchange relates to the honour of both parties and the debt incurred by the guest, such as the potlatch system.

Arterbury and Bellinger (2005) also note that:

[F]ollowing the expected protocol, the hosts and guests often forged long-term, mutual, reciprocal relationships in which both parties presumed the other's assistance whenever they were in their counterpart's region (e.g., Josh 2,1-21; 9,6.1 1.15.18-21; Jdg 4,17; 2 Kgs 4,8-10.25-31). (p. 388)

The forging of long-term relations underscores that beyond hospitality as the basis of honouring the host, it also has a future benefit for the host when travelling, as it extends the basis of mutual relations, and in the case of Genesis 18:1–16, Abraham and Sarah were the recipients of a blessing. In support of this aspect of future benefit, Reynolds (2006:96) writes, 'hospitality is a radical form of reciprocity that creates space for identifying with and receiving the stranger "as oneself"'.

The mutual relation of reciprocity is also supplemented by its voluntary nature because the created space of reciprocity is not compulsory. It is a voluntary form of exchange. Martin explained the difference between strangers [*ger*] and foreigners [*nokri*] in the 'Old Testament hospitality and the teleological fallacy' section; but ironically, this element also supports the voluntary nature of hospitality. In other words, not all people were invited and forged long-term mutual relations or spaces for identifying with each other. Arterbury and Bellinger (2005:388) and Martin (2014:3) also note that as a host was not compelled to invite a guest, a guest was also not obligated to accept the hospitality of a host. Hospitality was a voluntary engagement between people beyond the exclusion of foreigners, as determined by the host. The voluntary nature of the exchange in hospitality is emphasised by Malina (1986:182), who distinguishes three stages in the process of engagement, namely, the evaluation or testing of the stranger, the stranger is invited and becomes a guest, then becomes a transformed stranger (Jos 9).

The initial evaluation is important because it exemplifies that the host has a choice to extend an invitation. Malina (1986:183) writes that '... the stranger is potentially anything; he must be tested as to whether he can subscribe to the rules of the new culture'. These tests are used to determine whether a potential guest might harm or disrespect the host and the family. An example of an unsuccessful test is found in Josua 9:3–27, where Josua questioned Gibeonite guests concerning their identity and country of origin but still failed to recognise their deceptive plan to negotiate a treaty. Martin (2014:5) concurs that deception was always a likelihood; therefore, hospitality was always restricted and controlled. However, ultimately, the extension of hospitality is risky. Reynolds (2006) highlights that extending hospitality after the initial evaluation is ultimately based on trust because it entails that space is created for the guest:

Such trust places one in the hands of another, dependent on his or her goodwill. Stated negatively, this entails the risk of letting go of protective prejudgments, assumptions, and expectations. (p. 97)

Abraham's invitation to the three strangers in Genesis 18 is an exception based on face value. On the other hand, guests

are not obliged to accept the hospitality of a host, as was initially the case with the three guests that Lot invited to stay at his home in Genesis 19:2. Consequently, the establishment of mutual relations is based on the principle of voluntary exchange in which case both participants are at liberty to decline hospitality.

From this perspective of mutual relations and the voluntary nature of hospitality as reciprocity, it was a 'prized virtue in the ancient Israelite and later Jewish societies in general' (Arterbury & Bellinger 2005:289). The reciprocal and voluntary nature of hospitality may be summarised as follows (Arterbury & Bellinger 2005:391; Martin 2014:3–5):

- Hospitality within host–guest interactions highlights the common practice of hosts spotting travellers from a distance and eagerly offering hospitality to initiate a lasting connection or mutual relations (Gn 19; Jdg 19). However, the mutual relations are preceded by an evaluation of the guest that emphasises the voluntary nature of hospitality.
- The ratification of this hospitality is often marked by the guest's entry into the host's home, symbolising the guest's elevated status within the host's abode. This represents the phases of interaction from stranger to guest to transformed stranger that underscores the voluntary nature of hospitality (Gn 18; 1 Sm 15:41; 2 Sm 11:8).
- The role of cuisine in hospitality is emphasised, with hosts consistently surpassing their initial promises by providing elaborate meals and sometimes even lodging, which may symbolise the notion of gift-giving and duty by guests to honour the host as mutual relations. The host may be viewed as an important or wealthy person who is able to extend hospitality that increases their standing in a community but can also include the provision of accommodation for the host when travelling to the region of the guest (Jos 2,1–21; 9,6.1 1.15.18–21; Jdg 4,17; 2 Kgs 4,8–10.25–31).
- Hosts are expected to protect guests during their stay, shielding them from potential harm by fellow citizens or the guest's adversaries in support of mutual relations and future assistance (Jdg 19:23).
- Despite the typically brief nature of a guest's stay, the focus lies in the establishment of a relationship built on trust, respect and mutual obligation, whereby the reciprocal relationship brings about transformation and possible future benefit for both (Gn 18:1–16).
- Finally, a unique feature of this institution is the assumption that once the foundational relationship is formed, guests are welcome to return at any time (Gn 18:10, 14), confident of a warm and hospitable reception. This demonstrates the enduring and reciprocal nature of host–guest relationships.

In the 'Adam Smith and reciprocity' section, the role of mutual relations and voluntary exchange of hospitality as reciprocity in Smith's work will be explored as the basis for ethics of responsibility and accountability that do not succumb to a teleological fallacy.

## Adam Smith and reciprocity

Adam Smith's work on reciprocity from the 18th century is historically and culturally distinct from the world of the Old Testament and ANE society. His was a Scottish society of the Enlightenment that was transitioning from agrarianism and mercantilism to full-fledged industrial and commercial society. Reciprocity meant something else than that of a small-scale society where hospitality was viewed within a system where the honour of the host and duty of the guest informed social interaction. However, Smith's views of reciprocity include certain aspects that govern human interaction and reflect the progression of this principle in classic economics. These principles focus on the mutual relationships in human interaction and voluntary exchange with mutual benefit, an important ethical perspective for business ethics that is not a teleological interpretation of ANE hospitality through the eyes of Smith (Rathbone 2019). Rather, there are similarities and developments between Old Testament hospitality and classic economics that are based on the mutual relationship and voluntary exchange between two parties. Subsequently, both parties' mutual benefit fosters a sense of moral obligation that is also important for social harmony.

In Smith's discussion of mutual relationship in his work *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) (TMS), sympathy guides human interaction, with the natural inclination to reciprocate kindness and goodwill – similar to the kindness shown by a host and reciprocated by the guest's obligation to show respect to the host. Reciprocal behaviour is, therefore, the basis of societal harmony for Smith and Old Testament hospitality. The opening sentence of TMS endorses the principle of sympathy that emphasises the natural compassion for others:

How selfish soever man [*sic*] may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. (TMS I.i.1)

Although sympathy, according to Smith's explanation, does not benefit the agent, it does provide a sense of happiness. Because we do not have a sense of the experience of others, we attempt to 'conceive what we ourselves should feel in the like situation' (TMS I.i.2). The impartial spectator assists us through imagination to place ourselves in the situation of the other person to associate with the pain or joy of that person. This creates what Smith (TMS I.i.4) calls 'fellow-feeling', in which 'analogous emotion springs up' or sharing of passions. This is the basis of reciprocity in mutual human relations, and Smith observes that sympathy 'may be used to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever' (TMS I.i.4). This is like the sympathy shown by a host towards the need of a guest for shelter, food or protection. Fellow-feeling with another person's distress leads to an invitation after the guest is found to be appropriate, which becomes the basis for a mutual relation of reciprocity. Smith notes that:

Man [*sic*], say they conscious of his own weakness, and of the need which he has for the assistance of others, rejoices whenever he observes that they adopt his own passions, because he is then assured of that assistance; and grieves whenever he observes the contrary, because he is then assured of their opposition. (TMS I.ii.1)

In other words, fellow-feeling is the basis for acting and assisting someone in need, not only the agreeability of passions. The benefit which befalls the agents is the pleasure of fellow-feeling and witnessing the pleasure of the person who is no longer in distress. As mentioned, it can sometimes go against the self-interest of the person who is extending assistance; but in a commercial society, the voluntary nature of exchange is also important, and neither is it foreign to Old Testament hospitality. Walraevens (2020:657) notes that reciprocity in Smith is not only a matter of exchange of money for goods or services but is embedded in the social relations between people. Social relations are supported by the observation of 'benevolent actions and the pleasure (and gratitude) it gives to the beneficiary' (Walraevens 2020:666). The generosity and gratitude of people extend the fellow-feeling between people and not the mere exchange of goods.

Old Testament hospitality is also reciprocal in terms of the voluntary nature of the exchange because the host is not obliged to comply when a guest appears. In the Old Testament, foreigners [*nokri*] were excluded based on religious motivation. If a known stranger arrived, hospitality was also not a given, and there may have been tests to determine whether the guest was acceptable, while a guest was also free to decline an invitation. In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) (WN), Smith followed the principle of self-interest and the invisible hand of his free-market economics, which is more inclusive but remains voluntary and based on self-interest. The implication is that both the purchaser and the seller mutually benefit from the exchange and that the exchange is totally voluntary, in most cases, based on the needs of the buyer, the price, and quality of goods of the seller and the funds that the buyer has available. The self-interest of both parties in the exchange is a determinant in the reciprocal process. Degner (2021:6) confirms that the '... Bible describes the voluntary exchange as the practical and moral means to achieve peace, prosperity, and human flourishing'.

As mentioned earlier, the peace and harmony of voluntary exchange can also mediate relationships between strangers such as the *nokri* and, in this way, transcend cultural, religious and other boundaries between people. Smith, however, does qualify this possibility by adding that insufficient knowledge between strangers may reduce sympathy. Smith (TMS I.iv.9) explains that we:

... expect still less sympathy from an assembly of strangers, and we endeavour to bring down our passion to that pitch, which the particular company we are in may be expected to go along with.

While we may display less sympathy with strangers, we may attempt to transcend these limits because of commercial

reasons and self-interest. Smith (WN I.ii.2) famously stated that 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'. This iconic reference underscores the principle of voluntary exchange and mutual benefit, although it is often misunderstood as a slogan for amoral and exploitative capitalism. Alternatively, self-interest is an important motivation for self-care and dignity of self-preservation that does not equate to greed. Similarly, in Old Testament hospitality, the interest of the guest and host is at play in the reciprocal process. The guest benefits from the host's generosity, and the host, in exchange, benefits because his social standing or profile improves. The host is also promised future hospitality from the guest when travelling to the land of the guest.

## Ethics of responsibility and accountability

Reciprocity based on mutual relations and voluntary exchange in both Smith and Old Testament hospitality is important to understand the role of Old Testament hospitality as an ethical guide for human interaction in contemporary large-scale commercial society because the mutuality and voluntary beneficial reciprocity of human interaction open the important reflection on the ethics of responsibility and accountability for people involved in labour, entrepreneurial activity and so forth – whether they are believers or non-believers. This is done without stepping back into the teleological fallacy Hobbs warns about, but rather reviving Old Testament hospitality's relevance and ethical importance.

The ethics of responsibility are crucial in today's commercial world, where unethical practices abound. Old Testament hospitality as reciprocity highlights the importance of the roles and responsibilities of the host and guest in the mutual relationship. In the same way, the voluntary interaction that Smith describes underscores rules of engagement in terms of free and fair interaction about product price, quality, availability and so forth. Reciprocity is also a prevalent phenomenon in the hospitality industry (hotels, Airbnb, restaurants, etc.) that interestingly follows the social embeddedness of businesses noted by Smith (Heuman 2005). Smith (WN IV.iv.51) wrote:

All systems either of preference or of restraint, therefore, being thus completely taken away, the obvious and simple system of natural liberty establishes itself of its own accord. Every man [*sic*], as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest his own way, and to bring both his industry and capital into competition with those of any other man, or order of men.

Conversely, the purchaser must honour the deal and must have adequate and available funds. Mutual relationships and voluntary-based commercial transactions concern the benefit of both parties and the responsibility to execute a transaction in a responsible manner without deceit, unlawful behaviour, or dishonesty by providing a product or service that satisfies the self-interest of both and results in social benefit in general.



The interesting aspect of mutual relations is that they are based on social interaction, including hospitality and commerce, although commercial digital frameworks have minimised social contact. However, Smith does not support the type of mutual relationship perpetuated by Milton Friedman (1970), who views profit as the only purpose of business and believes that the reciprocity between business and shareholders should be a priority. Reciprocity, for Smith, is socially embedded, which means that the interaction between people and fellow-feeling are crucial for mutual relations to prosper.

Mutual relations for Smith were also part of various aspects of society, including governance, morality and economics. This aspect of reciprocity and responsibility is visible in the governance of a company by a board. Archie Carroll (2016) follows this socially embedded approach by highlighting four responsibilities that are crucial for responsible business practices in society:

- **Legal responsibility:** Compliance with laws and regulations.
- **Financial responsibility:** Responsible management and governance of an organisation's finances.
- **Ethical responsibility:** Following values beyond what is required by law or regulations.
- **Philanthropic responsibility:** Involvement in society and the environment.

Korsgaard (1992) is wary of the legal element of reciprocity and responsibility. He argues that the social aspect of mutual relations includes responsibility as a necessary consequence of human dignity:

To hold someone responsible is to regard her as a person—that is to say, as a free and equal person, capable of acting both rationally and morally. It is, therefore, to regard her as someone with whom you can enter the kind of relation that is possible only among free and equal rational people: a relation of reciprocity. (p. 306)

Korsgaard's point is that the mutual nature of reciprocal relationships naturally extends to taking responsibility for our actions and accepting accountability. However, in most cases, social relations are voluntary unless there is some form of commercial collusion or manipulation, or unless they are part of legislation or policy decisions that require mandatory compliance, as is the case with a company's governance.

Whether in terms of social relations or structural responsibilities, these aspects should function together for businesses to expand reciprocity beyond financial interest and include broader ethical and social aspects. Therefore, accountability is closely linked to the ethics of responsibility, as Korsgaard notes, which means that people will take responsibility or account for their actions. Breaches of hospitality in the Old Testament, where mutual relationship and exchange were not honoured, come with a strict warning. Exodus 22:21 and Leviticus 19:33–34 stipulate the provisions for the kind and fair treatment of strangers. This is also

underscored in the prophetic tradition: in Isaiah 58:7, the imperative to share food with the homeless and hungry is rooted in the hospitality tradition. Failure to honour the reciprocity directly impacts the host, who will be shamed and experience a decline in social profile. Similarly, the failure of the guest to follow their duty may result in losing the benefit of shelter, food and protection. For Smith, this failure to honour the kindness of others will lead to the disapprobation of others:

When the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotions of the spectator, they necessarily appear to this last just and proper, and suitable to their objects; and, on the contrary, when, upon bringing the case home to himself, he finds that do not coincide with what he feels, they necessarily appear to him unjust and improper, and unsuitable to the causes which excite them. (TMS I.ii.1)

In contrast, a deceitful and non-reciprocal exchange will damage the perpetrating party's reputation and possibly limit their engagement with others in the future. Ultimately, it may result in legal interventions. Naidoo (2009:3) notes that governance is important because it 'regulates the existence of power (i.e. authority, direction, and control) within a company in order to ensure that the company's purpose is achieved'.

Positively, accountability also includes corrective behaviour for the restoration of social harmony and relationship, with the possibility of the restored benefit of the guest and honour of the host – in other words, restored reciprocity. This will include reimbursement, payment to wronged parties, and the opportunity to grow and strengthen reciprocity in contemporary commercial society. In the workplace, this can lead to policy changes or improvement of the skills of workers. Likewise, many companies that suffered through corporate scandals subsequently improved their ethical culture and/or business dealings and systems of governance and management.

## Conclusion

This article aimed to explore the importance of Old Testament hospitality as reciprocity for contemporary business ethics without succumbing to teleological fallacy. This purpose was accomplished by discussing Hobbs's criticism concerning the inclusion of social justice, poverty and refugees from the perspective of Old Testament hospitality. It was found that although there is a clear difference between the hospitality of Old Testament small-scale societies and that of contemporary large-scale societies, the principle of reciprocity was not developed in depth.

An analysis of Old Testament hospitality as reciprocity, which is also associated with archaic society, highlights the mutual relationship and voluntary exchange of reciprocity in which the guest and host benefit. The guest receives accommodation, food, rest and so forth, while the honour of the host increases as a show of wealth, specifically if an important guest accepts an invitation. Hosts may also receive

future accommodation when travelling to the guest's region. In the case of Genesis 18:1-16, Abraham and Sarah received a blessing. Finally, this progression of reciprocity corresponds with the same elements in the work of Adam Smith, which is an important ethical perspective for business ethics that advances the ethics of responsibility and accountability, which is insightful for corporate social responsibility and governance, among others.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Author's contributions

M.R. declares that they are sole author of this research article.

### Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct the study was received from the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC) of the North-West University on 06 March 2024 with ethical clearance number NWU-00621-24-A4.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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