

Generous

To be generous is to give freely to other people, to causes or social situations, or, depending on your persuasion, to your maker, parents, or kin. (The reference of 'generous' is customarily to people, though this is not essential: one can be generous to the earth, by caring for her, or to wild animals, by preserving the wilderness for them, but these are not everyday uses of the word 'generous.') Just as orderliness and messiness feed on themselves, so does generosity; it makes a habit of itself. (So does stinginess, the opposite of generosity. It is, by the way, often noted that virtue is fundamentally good habit.

Examples

1

I am not a naturally generous person. I remember an occasion at a gas station in Oklahoma. I was filling our tank when a nicely dressed middle aged man came over to our car. He said to us that he was out of money, and didn't have enough to fill his tank with gas, which he needed to get him home. My instinctive reaction was to refuse, and I did so. I told him I was sorry, that I had budgeted for my trip, and wouldn't have enough if I gave him gas money. He walked away quietly. I am not sure where he went or what he did. When I get back in the car my wife told me I had made a mistake. One should always go with the gut of giving; and the man who had asked for money looked decent. I was humiliated. I searched inside myself for the source of such a reaction. I was born in the Depression. I was taught to respect hard-work, self-sufficiency, and frugality. I was not naturally generous. I felt miserable all the way home.

2

I am concerned with the immigration issue, which is a matter of intense debate in the United States. What attitude should we adopt toward immigration through out southern border with Mexico? I am for the most part both generous in spirit, toward those who want to share in my country, and dissatisfied at the way many of them are going about this. Not only am I a law and order person, on the whole, not only did my wife and I work hard and legally to manage her own immigration, but I find that the immigrants' attempts to circumvent the procedures of their host country are unworthy of prospective citizens. Hence I am both generous in spirit, toward immigrants from the south, and concerned that their actions should justify my desire to have them as fellow citizens.