

# A Spirit of Gratitude Is Healthy for Society

November 29, 2021

Greetings as we approach the 400th anniversary of the first Thanksgiving celebration. The Pilgrims in 1621 had much to be thankful for. They had arrived a year earlier with “no friends to wellcome them, nor inns to entertaine or refresh their weatherbeaten bodys, no houses or much less townes to repaire too, to seeke for succoure,” in the [words](#) of their leader, William Bradford. The Wampanoags, hoping the white settlers would help them fight other tribes, helped them survive the harsh winter. The wary allies celebrated that fall with a feast of turkeys, ducks and venison, although [probably not](#) cranberry sauce or pumpkin pie.

What does giving thanks have to do with economics? A lot, actually. I apologize if this sounds like an imitation of a [David Brooks column](#), but the truth is that a spirit of gratitude motivates precisely the behaviors that a successful economy requires, particularly [patience and generosity](#). For this newsletter I interviewed David DeSteno, a professor of psychology at Northeastern University (about 35 miles from where the Pilgrims landed), who is one of the leading authorities on the social effects of gratitude.

DeSteno’s recent papers include “Gratitude Reduces Consumption of Depleting Resources,” [completed](#) last year with Shanyu Kates, and “The Grateful Don’t Cheat: Gratitude as a Fount of Virtue” written with Fred Duong, Daniel Lim and Kates and [published](#) in Psychological Science in 2019. He [published](#) a book this year titled “How God Works: The Science Behind the Benefits of Religion.” I also recommend a [talk](#) that he gave at Google in 2018 on the topic of gratitude.

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