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The Normative and the Empirical in the Study of Gratitude

Robert C. Roberts

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**School of Education
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham**

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Robert C. Roberts
Baylor University

Introduction

Thanks in significant part to the interest and material support of the John Templeton Foundation, the virtue of gratitude is receiving notable attention from theologians, philosophers, and psychologists. Until recently, most of these investigations of gratitude were pursued within the standard research styles of the three disciplines, but because of the Foundation's insistence on interaction among the disciplines, some researchers, especially at the Jubilee Center at the University of Birmingham, are beginning to raise questions about the adequacy of traditional disciplinary approaches to the task at hand. For example, Gulliford, Morgan, and Kristjánsson (2013) are critical of recent psychological research for paying insufficient attention to the concept of gratitude on which the empirical investigations turn, and also of philosophical analyses of the concept for paying too little attention to what people actually have in mind when they speak or think about gratitude. I share both of these concerns, though not always for the same reasons as these authors. This paper contributes to the discussion of what it takes to succeed in the study of gratitude as a virtue. It is primarily about the relation between philosophical analysis and empirical investigations in the achievement of such success.

The Referents of 'Gratitude'

Psychologists sometimes comment on what I will call the gratitude family of concepts, as though the diversity in the family is somehow confusing or otherwise unfortunate. For example, citing Emmons, McCullough, and Tsang (2002), Lambert, Graham, and Fincham (2009, p. 1194; see also Nisters 2012) comment that "Researchers have variously conceptualized gratitude as a moral virtue, an attitude, an emotion, a habit, a personality trait, and a coping response." This is an important observation, and signals one of several ways that 'gratitude' can be ambiguous. It is important for researchers to know which member of the family they are investigating in any particular investigation and just how the family members are related, so I want to begin by commenting on the differences and relations that subsist among the members of the gratitude family of concepts. These concepts are not random items in a grab bag, but are related to one another in determinate ways that we can specify. Others may specify them in a slightly different way from my proposal in the following, but I think that any specification would have to make something like the following distinctions and make room for something like these concepts. With a map of the territory there should be no confusion about the object of research at this level of the concept.

Gratitude as an **emotion** is an episodic occurrence of a mental state: one feels grateful to somebody for something on a particular occasion. The emotion or feeling might not last long; for example, if upon thinking further about the giver's motive, you decide he was maliciously manipulating you, you might stop feeling grateful to him. We can also speak of gratitude as a particularized dispositional **state**, as when you say, looking back on your life, "I am especially grateful to my Uncle Larry for his attention to me during my adolescence." The state is a disposition to feel the emotion when thinking about Uncle Larry (a particular benefactor) or what he did (a particular benefit), but you can be in the state without currently feeling the emotion. Gratitude as a **personality trait** is not episodic and not particularized to some benefit and some benefactor, but a general disposition or tendency and it may last for a whole lifetime. If you have the personality trait of gratitude, then people might say that you are a grateful *person*. They will say this also if you have the **virtue** of gratitude, because a virtue, like a personality trait, is a disposition of the person. One possible difference is that whereas a personality trait may be thought to be innate, a virtue may be thought to have been acquired through living virtuously. That issue aside, the concept of a virtue is the concept of a personal disposition that is *excellent*, one that contributes to your excellence as a person. A personality trait can be either good or bad or neutral; a vice may be just as much a personality trait as a virtue. But a virtue cannot be bad or neutral. So if someone says you have the virtue of gratitude, he or she will mean to convey approval of your trait. A personality trait of gratitude might be operationally equivalent to a virtue of gratitude; but to apply the concept of virtue to it is to claim that it is excellent. The word '**habit**' is archaic for 'disposition.' In older translations of Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas, virtues are called habits. If these philosophers had distinguished personality traits from virtues and vices, they would nevertheless have thought of them as "habits." '**Attitude**' is a very general mental category word that includes emotion. Any of the following is an attitude: an opinion, a desire, an aversion, a belief, a question, a mood, an intention; and any of these can have either an episodic reference or a dispositional one. One could have a momentary attitude, which might be an emotion or other state (a hopeful attitude, an angry attitude, a questioning attitude, a resolute attitude, an attitude of uncertainty, etc. etc.); but one can also have a dispositional attitude in any of these modes. So both an emotion of gratitude and a trait of gratitude could be called an attitude — either a momentary one or an habitual attitude "toward the world." Since just about anything mental counts as an attitude, gratitude is certainly an attitude. '**Coping response**' is in a different category from the above: to me it sounds like psychology jargon for *a way of getting along in life*. It seems to embed an explanation of the disposition to feel grateful: people develop the disposition to feel grateful because... and then we list various life advantages that this disposition affords its possessor: she gets treated more graciously by others, she feels better about herself than people who are disposed to complain or to bear grudges, and so forth; and gratitude is a response to the challenges of life that fosters such "coping." Similarly, Emmons et al. (2002) cite McCrae and Costa (1999) speaking of gratitude as a "**characteristic adaptation**": "Specifically, it might be fruitful to conceptualize the disposition toward gratitude in part as a characteristic adaptation that is preferentially deployed by highly extraverted, minimally neurotic, and highly agreeable people for navigating their worlds" (p. 124). Traditionally, virtues are traits that make life

better for their possessors and their possessors' associates; so one might say that to call gratitude a virtue is, classically, to regard it as a successful "coping response" or "adaptation." Another important member of the gratitude family, not mentioned in the list by Emmons et al. is **thanksgiving** — the active expression of gratitude. This kind of action will go with the emotion, episodic gratitude, and episodes of thanksgiving will be, like episodes of the emotion that they express, characteristic of the person with the trait of gratitude.

The conceptual map that I've just sketched suggests three things: first, the diversity of the vocabulary of gratitude doesn't imply that the concept is in disarray, nor does it need to beget any confusion. The variety within the gratitude family just requires that we make some distinctions. Second, my comments suggest that the family is actually smaller than the list from Emmons et al. may make it seem; its members just have more than one name, names that differ in degree of generality or in suggesting gratitude's social usefulness. Thus the emotion or feeling of gratitude is also an attitude, and the virtue of gratitude is also a trait of personality, a "habit," and an attitude; and insofar as gratitude is virtuous or a virtue, it is also a coping response or adaptation. Third, it suggests that the distinct members of the gratitude family are genuinely a family: related to one another in distinct and specifiable ways. Thus the trait of gratitude is a disposition to feel the emotion of gratitude and to express the emotion of gratitude in gestures, facial expressions, and actions, especially actions of thanksgiving. And when that trait is excellent, it is a virtue (a coping response and characteristic adaptation).

The map also suggests an order of research. The leading member of the family seems to be the emotion. After all, the trait of gratitude is just a disposition to feel gratitude, and thanksgiving is just the expression of the emotion of gratitude. So to understand gratitude as a trait, we must first of all understand gratitude as an emotion. But we have to acknowledge the possibility that a *trait* of gratitude may not be the *virtue* of gratitude. Most of the psychological research that has been done into gratitude has been part of the "positive psychology" movement, and philosophers too have typically looked for a version of gratitude that was virtuous. The *virtue* of gratitude is an excellent *version* of the trait, and it may be possible to have a trait of gratitude that is defective in various ways — perhaps it is fawning (the "coping" is inordinately directed toward gaining favors of status), or trivial (feeling gratitude for trivial rather than significant things, feeling more intense gratitude for trivial things than for important ones), or feeling gratitude to the wrong persons, and perhaps in other ways. Presumably the virtue of gratitude will be a disposition to virtuous episodes of the emotion, and so we will also be interested in what makes an episode of gratitude virtuous. This will be something more specific than what makes it gratitude.

A "Standard" Analysis of Gratitude as an Emotion

Our project is to understand the virtue of gratitude. The virtue is a trait, and a trait is a disposition. Since the disposition of gratitude is a disposition to the mental state — the emotion or feeling of gratitude and consequently to the actions that it motivates — it follows that research into the emotion will be fundamental to our research into the virtue.

We will not be clear about what the virtue of gratitude is unless we understand the emotion to which it is a disposition. The virtue of gratitude has been studied for millennia. One of the most thorough classical studies of the virtue is the treatise *On Favors* by the first century C.E. Stoic Seneca (1995). I have offered the following schema (Roberts 2004, revised) as my version of a classical understanding of the mental state of gratitude. My idea is that each of the sentence-forms below identifies an aspect of the way a person who fully experiences gratitude construes (sees, feels, understands, thinks about) his or her situation.

When a person can say sincerely and with full propriety, “I am grateful to S for X,” that person implicitly (or explicitly) has the following thoughts about himself, S and X. (The expressions in parentheses indicate that these thoughts are laden with what I call “concern” — caring about the benefit, the benefactor, the benefactor’s attitude toward the beneficiary, the relation of the subject to the benefactor, etc.)

- 1 X is a benefit to me (I care about having X; thus I see X as good).
- 2 S has acted well in conferring X on me (I care about receiving, or am at least willing to receive, X *from* S).
- 3 In conferring X, S has acted benevolently toward me (I care about [like] S’s benevolence to me, as expressed in his conferral of X).
- 3a: In conferring X benevolently, S has gone beyond merely dutiful motivation.
- 4 In conferring X with generous benevolence, S has put me in debt of grace to him or her (I am willing to be in debt of grace to S).
- 5 S’s benevolence and conferral of X show that S is good (I am drawn to S). (Or: S’s goodness shows that X is good and that in conferring X, S is benevolent.¹)
- 6 I want to express my indebtedness and attachment to S in some token return benefit.

The claim is not that the person runs through each of these sentences every time he feels grateful; it is, rather, that he “sees” or construes his situation in these terms. If he is an articulate person he might explain his feeling using sentences that express thoughts with these forms. If someone says, Why are you so grateful to him?, he might point to the benefit (1), or he might point to the fact that the benefactor acted benevolently toward him (3), or that she was moved by more than the call of duty in conferring the good on him (3a), or he might point out how glad he is to receive this particular benefit from this particular benefactor (2), or note that he is indebted to S for his kindness (4). It’s unlikely that he’ll go through the whole list, but these are the things he’ll point to in explaining his gratitude. The emotion can exemplify all these dimensions without the subject’s being explicitly aware of all of them, and some of the features of the situation can be more salient to the subject than the others.

My claim is also not that all such sentences have to be true for the subject to be experiencing gratitude. A person can feel genuine gratitude despite the fact that his mental state is not very well warranted by the situation. Maybe the “benefit” is actually a

¹ On this alternative construal, see Søren Kierkegaard’s “————” in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*.

course. Maybe the subject is unwise in being glad to receive something from this particular benefactor. Maybe the benefactor was not actually benevolent in conferring the good on him; perhaps she acted only out of a sense of duty. So the claim is not that the *situation* fits the sentence-forms above, but that the subject *sees* the situation in these terms.

Also, my claim is not that the subject *believes* propositions corresponding to these propositional forms. Maybe the subject doesn't believe that the benefactor was going beyond her duty or that she was really being benevolent in conferring on him the good for which he is grateful. All that is required, on my view of this classical analysis, is that the subject *see* the situation in these terms.

Four Explanatory Notes

First, 3a clarifies 3: it says that even if, in conferring X, S is doing S's duty, S does not act *merely* from duty. 3a makes this an implication of S's acting benevolently toward me. If, for example, my doctor, in facilitating my healing, is doing what I am paying her to do and thus is doing her duty, if I am grateful to her for her help, I do not think of her as merely doing her duty, but as expressing, in her actions, good will (benevolence) toward me. I do not necessarily see the benefactor as having *brought about* a greater benefit than it was her duty to bring about, but as having performed the action with a *motive* that goes beyond performing the action for the sake of fulfilling her duty.

My second point is about gratitude's hedonic tone. The grateful person takes pleasure in the benefit and in the relation of indebtedness to the benefactor. Apparently, some evidence suggests that some people have a "negative" response to the idea of gratitude (see **CITATION**). They associate it with uncomfortable indebtedness, with feeling unpleasantly burdened by the benefit or the relation to the benefactor. Nothing that I say here is inconsistent with this datum, because feelings *of* gratitude are not the same as feelings *about* gratitude. I don't deny that a person can have "mixed" feelings about being indebted to his benefactor, but to the extent that a person feels uncomfortable being in a debt of grace to his benefactor, to that extent this person is not grateful. Gratitude is an *essentially* pleasant emotion. This is fully compatible with someone's finding the *idea* of gratitude unpleasant, and illustrates the difference between the grammar of a concept and associations with the concept. This is basic the confusion of the studies by Lambert, Graham, and Fincham (2009) discussed below.

Third, let me comment on the notion of debt associated with gratitude. In discussions of gratitude, people often feel that the word 'debt' doesn't belong. "A duty to *be grateful* sounds like a joke" (Card 1988, 117). Gratitude, they think, is not about debts, but about free gifts. But if a duty is implied by the kind of debt that gratitude acknowledges, it is not the duty to *be grateful*, but the duty to "pay" the debt with a token of appreciation. The intuition (or objection) seems to depend on supposing that debt and indebtedness are univocal concepts, associated only with matters of strict justice. Since the concept of debt is embedded in our language about gratitude, and the traditional philosophical understanding of gratitude partakes of it, perhaps we should distinguish (at least) two kinds of debt — debts of justice and debts of grace. Unlike a debt of justice, a debt of

grace is not to be paid *up* (tit for tat, made *even*) or paid *off* (so that the debt goes out of existence), but only “paid” by a token of the beneficiary’s gratitude, and binds the beneficiary in affection (attachment) to the benefactor. If the beneficiary experiences this debt as a burden (therefore as unpleasant), this is likely to be either because a) he doesn’t want to be in this kind of gracious relationship with S or b) he construes his debt as a debt of justice (one that needs to be paid *up* and *off*). In either case the beneficiary’s response will fall short of being gratitude.

Fourth, I assume throughout the analysis that the subject of gratitude is the beneficiary, and thus write ‘to me’ in proposition 1. This assumption is commonly, but not always, true. Gulliford, Morgan, and Kristjánsson (2013) consider an example in which a benefactor gives a young man some much needed and appreciated money, and his mother feels grateful to the benefactor for the benefit he has conferred on her son. Gulliford et al. suggest that this example shows a quadratic structure, in contrast with the triadic structure (benefactor-benefit-beneficiary) of the standard analysis. Thus we might think the scenario has a benefit, a benefactor, and *two* beneficiaries — a primary one (the son) and a secondary (the mother). The son receives the benefit and the mother receives the benefit of the son’s receiving the benefit. But I don’t think this analysis is phenomenologically correct. The mother’s gratitude is not for the benefit *she* receives, but for the one her son receives. It is of course imaginable that the mother sees the son’s being given the gift as a gift to herself (perhaps it relieves her of a financial burden); but this is not the most natural, or a necessary, reading of the case. As I see it, the mother is grateful for the gift *to her son*. She does not construe herself as the beneficiary, but him; nevertheless, *she* is grateful. This kind of case shows that the beneficiary in the triad need not be the subject of the emotion. It is analogous to being afraid for someone else, or angry on someone else’s behalf. The difference is that in gratitude, the beneficiary is usually the subject, whereas it is perhaps more common in the cases of fear and anger for the threatened or the offended to be someone other than the subject. Finally, note that it is certainly possible for the beneficiary to be plural: a whole family can be grateful that the breadwinner has a good job. Each is grateful for the benefit, let us say, both on his own behalf and on behalf of the whole family. But the structure of the emotion remains triadic.

Two Interpretations of the Conditions in the Standard Analysis

Even if we posit, as I do, that neither the situation nor the subject’s beliefs need to conform to the model for the subject’s mental state to be genuine gratitude on this model, the schema can be interpreted in at least two ways. We can call these interpretations the *Socratic* and the *quasi-Wittgensteinian* (Wittgensteinian for short). Socrates went about asking interlocutors to explain virtues to him — traits like piety, courage, and justice. He wanted his interlocutors to name conditions for the virtue — somewhat like the six conditions in our classical analysis of gratitude. But he insisted that the conditions be individually strictly *necessary* for anything’s counting as a member of the class. In other words, on a Socratic interpretation, a person who construed his situation in five out of six of the listed conditions, but did not, say, construe the benefit as coming from a benefactor, or construe his benefactor as benevolent, or construe what was conferred on him as a benefit, would completely fail to exemplify gratitude. A failure of the construal to meet

any one of the conditions would constitute a complete failure of the construal to count as gratitude.

On a Wittgensteinian interpretation, in contrast with the Socratic, the conditions in the list are not strictly necessary, but only (perhaps) ideal. This list — or some instance of gratitude that does meet all the conditions — could be taken as a *prototype* or *paradigm* or *model* of gratitude from which other instances of gratitude can deviate somewhat without ceasing to be gratitude. They might be cases of gratitude, all right, but cases that are less than prototypical, less than paradigmatic. Thus a person who sees the conferral as a benefit (he is really glad to have it) but does not see the benefactor as appropriate might still count as being grateful. Maybe he doesn't like receiving the benefit from this benefactor because he knows she is in love with him and doesn't want the kind of debtful relationship that binds him with *her*. Perhaps someone who thinks in this Wittgensteinian way would say that he is grateful for the gift but not grateful to the benefactor. Or a person who finds himself feeling grateful for his very life, yet construes his life as not originating from any benefactor, but only from a process of blind evolution, might still say that he is grateful for his life, and justify the use of the term by pointing out that life is a great benefit. It is of course possible that such a subject covertly and vaguely and even unbeknownst to himself construes his life as having originated from a benefactor, even though he is convinced that *there is* no such benefactor. We might interrogate such a subject, asking him why he wants to say he feels *grateful* for his life, rather than just that he is *glad to be alive*. If he really prefers the former expression, why does he prefer it? He might say that in his thinking he *associates* his having life with other cases of having benefits in which there is clearly a benevolent benefactor. That is, he stresses the similarity between this case and the prototype. And this association is what makes him prefer 'grateful' to 'glad' as a term for his feeling. But again, we might wonder whether this association doesn't really amount to a vague, covert construal of his life as from a benefactor. It may be harder to shake theology when we are talking about construals as compared with outright beliefs. The issues are difficult here, and I don't resolve them in this paper.

Empirical Investigation of Gratitude as a Trait

McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang have devised a brief questionnaire (the GQ-6) for measuring gratitude as a trait, which they used in their 2002 article, "The Grateful Disposition: a Conceptual and Empirical Topography," to investigate possible correlations between trait gratitude and other dispositions such as positive affect and wellbeing, pro-social behavior, and religiousness, and the relationship between gratitude and such "big five" personality traits as Extraversion/positive affectivity, Neuroticism/negative affectivity, and Agreeableness. They found that gratitude is positively correlated with the first three of these tendencies, and that these correlations are not reducible to correlations with members of the big five. Here are the questions of the GQ-6:

- ___ 1. I have so much in life to be thankful for.
- ___ 2. If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.
- ___ 3. When I look at the world, I don't see much to be grateful for.

- ____4. I am grateful to a wide variety of people.
 ____5. As I get older I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history.
 ____6. Long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone.

One's response to each statement is to be rated on the following scale:

- 1 = strongly disagree
 2 = disagree
 3 = slightly disagree
 4 = neutral
 5 = slightly agree
 6 = agree
 7 = strongly agree

(Questions 3 and 6 are to be reverse-graded.)

The questionnaire assumes an inexplicit but shared understanding of what gratitude is. The word 'grateful' occurs in four out of the six statements. In the first statement 'thankful' is a plausible equivalent of 'grateful,' and in the fifth 'appreciate,' while not exactly a synonym for 'be grateful for,' is often used loosely as a substitute, so in the context of the explicit gratitude words in the other statements, it is plausible that the participant will take 'appreciate' as meaning 'be grateful for.' (However, the question is a little bit problematic, since strictly speaking a person might appreciate the people and events in her life without being grateful for them.) The statements indicate aspects of the standard analysis. The first three statements refer prepositionally to the benefit, speaking of what one is grateful *for*. The fourth and sixth make prepositional reference to the benefactor: the person or other *to* whom (which) one is grateful. Furthermore, each statement uses the first-person singular pronoun, and it is very plausible to identify the 'I' with the beneficiary, though I have pointed out that the subject of gratitude need not be the beneficiary.

So it seems to me that the GQ-6, while not very conceptually precise, is probably able roughly to measure a participant's sense of his own gratitude, and it seems to me that the correlations that McCullough et al. found with pro-sociality and wellbeing, as well as the independence of gratitude from the big five personality traits, provide some evidence that trait gratitude, understood as the investigators and the participants understand it, is a good trait.

But some psychologists have registered dissatisfaction with the GQ-6, and with the general state of imprecision of the concept of gratitude, and have proposed ways of determining more precisely what gratitude is.

A So-Called Prototype Method of Analyzing Gratitude

One such effort is Lambert, Graham, and Fincham 2009, "A Prototype Analysis of Gratitude: Varieties of Gratitude Experiences." They point out that the burgeoning

literature on gratitude as a virtue has neglected to study the layperson's concept of gratitude. Especially for studies like McCullough et al. 2002 that depend on subjects' self-reported gratitude, it would appear to be crucial that investigators have a clear conception of what the subjects have in mind when they speak of gratitude. Otherwise, when the investigators find correlations of self-reported gratitude with, say, subjective wellbeing or increased physical health, they will not know precisely what these latter things are actually correlated with. If properties like subjective wellbeing and increased physical health are taken to be indicators that episodes of gratitude are virtuous and the gratitude disposition (trait) is a virtue, such investigators will still be somewhat in the dark about just which episodes are virtuous and which disposition is a virtue.

The investigators asked a group of 94 undergraduates to list words that came to mind in connection with gratitude. This procedure yielded 760 contributions, averaging 8.35 "features" per subject. These were then tidied up a bit by some graduate assistants, who reduced the list to 219 "attributes." Of these, 167 were listed by fewer than 3 participants, and so were removed, leaving just 52 "features." Unsurprisingly, the resulting list of so-called "features" of the concept of gratitude is a rollicking hodge-podge of items bearing various kinds of logical and non-logical relation to the concept of gratitude. For example, high on frequency were 'Thankful,' 'Grateful,' and 'Expressing thanks / "thank you."' One of these is simply the adjectival form of the same word as 'gratitude,' one is a synonym for 'grateful,' and one is the action of expressing gratitude. Because of the close approximation to *synonymy*, these data are of course eminently unhelpful in determining what 'gratitude' means or what gratitude is, or what the subjects think gratitude is. Another very high frequency item was 'appreciation,' which the standard analysis would take to be a genuine *feature* of the gratitude, inasmuch as gratitude consists in appreciation (positive affective evaluation) of the benefit and the benefactor, as well as of the beneficiary's relationship with the benefactor. 'Happy feeling' was mentioned a lot, and 'Warm feeling' about 1/3 as often. 'Emotions' made the list, but was relatively infrequent. These are the *kinds* of thing that episodes of gratitude are; that is, gratitude (as an emotion, not as a trait) is a kind of emotion or feeling, not, say, a kind of sensation or sensory perception or belief. 'Reciprocation of favor / gift' was frequent, no doubt for the same reason as 'Expressing thanks / "thank you,"' namely because this is the *characteristic action* of the person feeling gratitude. But in addition to the synonyms, the genuine features of the concept, the kind-terms for episodic gratitude, and gratitude's characteristic action, many of the so-called "features" of the concept of gratitude turned up by Lambert et al. are *mere associations*, for example, 'Money,' 'Prayer,' 'Knowing what others don't have,' 'Friends,' 'Respectful,' 'Sincerity,' 'Family,' 'Crying,' 'Jealousy / Envy,' 'Hugging,' 'Humble,' etc. etc. (See Lambert et al. p. 1197 for a statistical table of these so-called "features.") Thus we have a hodge-podge of kinds of items that people associate with gratitude. A few of them are actually features of the concept, but Lambert et al. do not distinguish the status of these genuine features from synonymous terms, kinds concepts, characteristic actions, and mere associations.

Lambert et al.'s method of "conceptual analysis" entirely neglects what we might call the structure of the concept — the conceptual relations that internally constitute the concept *as a concept*. We've reviewed the conceptual structure of gratitude as a rough consensus

of philosophers have described it since at least as far back as the first century C.E. We have said that to be in the mental state of gratitude is to construe a beneficiary as having received a benefit from a benefactor, where the subject (usually the beneficiary) is glad of the benefit (appreciates its goodness) and appreciates the good will of the benefactor in conferring the benefit and the appropriateness of this benefactor's conferring this benefit on this beneficiary. Other emotion concepts analogously have their own peculiar conceptual structures. For example, to be in the state of fear is to construe something one cares about as subject to a significant probability of harm by something (a threat). To be in the state of anger is to construe something that one cares about as having been culpably wronged by someone (an offender). To be in the state of envy is to construe someone as a succeeding rival in some measure of excellence that bears hard on one's self-esteem. In each of these cases the emotion organizes or sketches or constructs or construes elements in the subject's situation in accordance with a set of interrelated concepts: a threat and a threatened, a victim and a wrong and a wrongdoer, two rivals and an issue of excellence bearing on the value of the rivals in such a way that the one's triumph is the other's defeat, etc. for all the main types of emotion. In each case, the concept of the emotion reflects the structure of the emotion of which it is a concept. To give an analysis of an emotion concept — even a prototype analysis — must be to highlight and make evident the internal structure of the emotion — the bearing of the essential elements of the emotion to one another. A mere list of things that people associate with the name of an emotion cannot be the analysis of the emotion or its concept. Consequently, what Lambert et al. offer is not a conceptual analysis at all, but instead a study of the associations that people tend to have with the word 'gratitude.'

We can get another angle on this same point by reflecting on the idea that concepts have a "grammar." The metaphor of grammar as applied to concepts suggests the kind of structure that a sentence in a language has, elements that are organized in a sense-making way. If the sentence is well formed, so that its grammatical parts interrelate in just the right way, it makes sense; it can be understood, and it can be understood as *about something*. (This does not guarantee that the sentence is true, but only that it makes sense.) Many sentences, like emotions, are about situations: So-and-so has given me such-and-such good intentionally and with good will towards me. But random associations of words don't produce a properly formed sentence. Lists of words don't constitute a sentence (even if you somehow weight the words so that some are more central to the sentence than others or occur more frequently than others in lists of words with these associations). Lists are not governed by a grammar. And while a person may recognize all the individual words on a list, they don't together correspond to any state of affairs in the world. They don't reflect the structure of a situation.

Emotions are about situations and they are ways of making sense of those situations. The situations are configurations of elements that fit together in certain ways, or can be construed as fitting together in these sense-making ways. For example, anger is a way of making sense of a situation that contains an offense, an offender, and an offended. When you feel anger, you see the offense as an offense, the offender as the *doer* of the offense, and the victim as the one that is offended *against* by the offender's offense. If you see (organize, construct, reconstruct, construe) the situation in this way and are thus angry at

the offender for the offense against the victim, you *understand* the situation in these terms. Your emotion makes this kind of sense of the situation. Again, this is not to say that the situation *is* as your emotion makes sense of it; emotions, like sentences, can be false while still making sense.

Lambert et al. do try to get at something like the structure of the concept, inasmuch as they find large differences in the frequency of the things that people associate with the word ‘gratitude.’ For example, participants associated ‘Appreciation’ with gratitude more than 18 times as frequently as ‘Crying’ and ‘Knowing what others don’t have.’ They also conducted a related study in which they showed participants the items that they gleaned from the first study and asked them to rank the items for their centrality to the concept of gratitude. For example, participants ranked ‘Appreciation’ the most central of the 52 “features” of gratitude, and ‘Jealousy / envy’ as the least central.

This example is instructive about what the study can show about the structure of the concept. It would suggest that, in that structure, Appreciation is central and Jealousy / envy is peripheral. The problems with this suggestion are at least threefold. First, to say that appreciation is central is not to say anything about the actual role that appreciation plays in the concept — the way in which it interlocks or interacts with the other parts of the conceptual structure, thus making a *structure*. But this is just the sort of thing that traditional conceptual analysis tells us. Appreciation does have a structural role in the concept of gratitude, but what this role is isn’t shown by the frequency with which people mention appreciation in connection with gratitude, nor is it shown by the centrality ranking that people assign to it. Second, what about the claim that jealousy / envy is a peripheral feature of the structure of gratitude? The problem with this suggestion is that jealousy / envy isn’t a feature of the structure of gratitude *at all*. It is merely something that some people, namely 7.69% of the participants in the study, associate with gratitude. But associations don’t yield membership in the structure of a concept. Third, we’ve seen that a prototype analysis of a concept offers a prototype or model or paradigm of what the concept is of. A prototype can be an actual case — say, an exemplary historical example of gratitude — or it can be a set of features bearing some structural relation to one another, to which various cases that fall under the concept approximate, by exhibiting some but not necessarily all of the central features. But the so-called prototype analysis of Lambert et al. doesn’t seem to offer a prototype of gratitude in either of these senses.

What would a prototype that was yielded by the Lambert et al. style of analysis look like? If we take frequency of mention and judged centrality to be what makes “features” prototypical, and assign cut-offs of 15% for frequency and 7.1 out of 8 for judged centrality, then a mental state would be prototypical for gratitude if it had the following features (taken from Table 1, p. 1197): Appreciation, Thankful, Grateful, Helping someone, Happy feeling, Nice / kind, Being caring, Loving, Satisfaction, Reciprocation of favor / gift, Expressing thanks / “thank you”, and Family. These would not be treated as necessary conditions for a mental state’s being gratitude, but as a fund of conditions from which a selection of an indeterminate size would warrant that state’s inclusion in the category. Perhaps if a mental state had the “features” of Family, Loving, Satisfaction, and Nice / kind, it would count as a case of gratitude? Or would it have to have at least one of

the following “features”: Thankful, Grateful, and Expressing thanks / “thank you”? Lambert et al. don’t go down this dark alley, despite the fact that they claim to be offering a prototype analysis, and the above are the features that would be most plausibly prototypical on their method.

Surprisingly, when they talk about kinds of gratitude, they revert to what looks very much like a product of the standard analysis. They distinguish “benefit-triggered” from “generalized” gratitude. They seem to think that this distinction mirrors Steindl-Rast’s (2004) distinction between *thankfulness*, which does follow the standard analysis in terms of benefit, beneficiary, and benefactor, and *gratefulness*, which is a kind of cosmic gratitude that refers to no benefactor. Steindl-Rast describes gratefulness as a person’s experience of himself as beneficiary of a “kindness” or “inclusion” (pp. 284–5) (in the cosmos), a sort of gift that the subject construes as undeserved. But if the subject is asked, “to whom do you owe this benefit?” her answer will be, “nobody.” In this way, “gratefulness” does refer to a benefit (this kindness [being kin to] or inclusion in the cosmos); it is distinct from what he calls “thankfulness” in that it posits no benefactor, no one *to whom* the gratefulness is directed. Thus it has a specific *for what*, but no *to whom*.

But this is quite different from Lambert et al.’s distinction between “benefit-triggered” and “generalized” gratitude. The two expressions, ‘benefit-triggered’ and ‘generalized,’ do not identify distinct concepts, because benefits can be generalized; a generalized benefit is still a benefit! In fact, a generalized benefit (say, a good life) may be more of a benefit than a very particular one (say, a raise in salary). So gratitude may be “triggered” by either a particular benefit or a generalized benefit. Furthermore, distinctions made in terms of generality are not very clear or determinate; they are highly dependent on context. A salary raise seems to be a more general benefit than a one-time commission, but less general than a good life. So is it a general benefit or not? Lambert et al. sort cases confidently into “benefit-triggered” or “generalized,” but this is far too fuzzy to count as science. So their distinction is doubly ill conceived.

The Lambert et al. “prototype analysis” of the “concept” of gratitude may be of interest in showing what a population thinks about or associates with gratitude, but it is neither an analysis of a concept (since it necessarily fails to identify a conceptual structure), nor a prototype analysis (since it offers no clear prototype and seems even to lack the resources to do so), and in the end reverts to something like the standard analysis as the paradigm, but in doing so distinguishes two types of gratitude that are not two types of gratitude.

The Gulliford-Morgan Gratitude Vignette Questionnaires

Liz Gulliford and Blaire Morgan of the Jubilee Center at the University of Birmingham (UK) have devised a much more promising research strategy for investigating lay conceptions of gratitude. Starting with the conditions specified in the standard analysis, they devise a series of four scenarios, two “high stakes” and two “low stakes,” that are in the neighborhood of situations that evoke gratitude from people. A basic scenario — say, a fire breaks out in your house and you are trapped, but someone rescues you — is then varied in ways that reflect the conditions for gratitude that are specified in the standard

analysis, thus testing the subject's concept of gratitude for its conformity to the standard analysis. For example, in one variant of the fire scenario, the rescuer is only doing his duty (testing [??] condition 3a, that the benefactor is construed as going beyond his duty in conferring the benefit); in another, one rescuer tries but fails to save you, and has to be rescued by a professional (testing condition 1, that the beneficiary sees the benefit as a benefit: does the mere serious *intention* to benefit count as a benefit, or must the benefactor succeed in conferring an intended benefit, to warrant gratitude?). See Appendix 1 for the entire fire scenario. **(THIS WILL NEED TO BE CHANGED.)**

Unlike Lambert et al., whose investigation is about people's associations with the word 'gratitude,' the Gulliford-Morgan vignettes present *situations* that are plausibly construed in gratitude terms, and thus reproduces the kind of context that is characteristic for gratitude. The situations have a structure — characters doing things toward one another for reasons that make more or less plausible the situation-reconstruction characteristic for gratitude. Because of their narrative structure, the situations are ones that at least *raise the question* whether gratitude as an emotion would make sense here. It is true that a person's emotional response to a situation (what I have called her "construal" of it) may not perfectly reflect the structure of the *situation*, and may not even reflect perfectly the subject's *beliefs* about the situation. But the narrative of the situation does seem likely to correspond in a rough way to the respondent's construal of it, and this is a big step forward from mere word-association.

I will now comment on the questionnaires as instruments for testing popular understandings of the concept of gratitude, focusing on the fire story version in its October 2013 incarnation. The questionnaires are works in progress. I will try to contribute to their improvement by offering some criticisms and suggesting some variants. Here is the first statement and the questions that are asked about it.

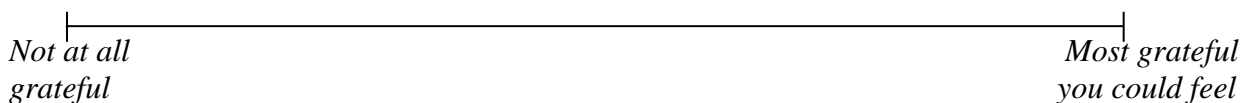
Scenario 1a.

A fire starts in your house and you become trapped. Another person finds you and rescues you.

Q1². You are grateful to this person for her help.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Q2. *Please indicate the degree of gratitude you feel on the scale below by placing a **vertical line** on the scale that corresponds to the amount of gratitude you would feel:*



Q3. You *should* be grateful to this person for her help.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

² I have added numbers to the three questions for easy reference.

One problem is that the Likert scale for Q1 is susceptible of two different interpretations:

Interpretation #1 of the Likert Scale:

1=Strongly agree: I am very sure that I feel grateful to this person for her help

2=Agree: I am pretty sure that I feel grateful to this person for her help

3=Neither agree nor disagree: I have no opinion about whether I feel grateful to this person for her help

4=Disagree: I am pretty sure I don't feel grateful to this person for her help

5=Strongly disagree: I am absolutely sure that I don't feel grateful to this person for her help

Interpretation #2 of the Likert Scale:

1=Strongly agree: I feel extremely grateful to this person for her help

2=Agree: I feel grateful to this person for her help

3=Neither agree nor disagree: I feel neither grateful nor ungrateful to this person for her help

4=Disagree: I feel ungrateful to this person for her help

5=Strongly disagree: I feel strongly ungrateful to this person for her help

Interpretation #1 is the most natural reading of the English, but if the line scale question is intended as a reiteration of the Likert scale question, then interpretation #2 of the Likert scale is the one the questionnaire intends.

The declared intention of this questionnaire is to probe the participant's concept of gratitude — the participant's understanding of the grammar of gratitude. But on either interpretation of the Likert scale question, as well as on the line scale question, the questionnaire appears to be an exercise in *counterfactual autobiography*: if this were to happen to *me*, *here's* how *I* would feel. But it is well known that people sometimes feel in ways that they themselves believe to be unfitting (they feel angry when they know they have no reason to do so, they feel guilty or afraid when they believe there's nothing to be guilty or afraid of, etc.) or fail to feel what they know it would be appropriate to feel (I know the situation calls for gratitude, but I don't feel grateful). So counterfactual emotional autobiography does not perfectly track emotion concept. Also, the accuracy of such autobiography depends on a degree of self-knowledge that the participant may not possess, and is subject to distortions of self-enhancement.

Perhaps the autobiographical answer roughly mirrors the participant's opinion about the grammar of gratitude, but since it does not do so perfectly, the questionnaire's administrator should realize that it may not reliably indicate the participant's understanding of gratitude.

The ambiguity in Q3 is that 'should' can be given either a conceptual or an ethical interpretation. In the conceptual interpretation, it means, "In this situation it makes sense to feel grateful. This is the kind of situation that fits the logic of gratitude." But someone who thinks that gratitude fits this situation might still not think that he should feel grateful (see Aristotle 1980 book 4 chapter 3, who thinks that gratitude is demeaning to the person who feels it; also, apparently a significant number of Britons associate gratitude with uncomfortable feelings of obligation and may thus be inclined to think it's not a good thing [REFERENCE]). Again, this ambiguity introduces a certain

unreliability into the questionnaire as an instrument for testing the understanding of gratitude.

These problems with the reliability of the questionnaire as formulated lead me to think it might be better just to ask quite directly about the participant's understanding of the concept of gratitude. So I suggested that Gulliford and Morgan revise their vignette questionnaires along the lines of the variant in Appendix 2, asking the participant whether it would be "fitting" or "appropriate" to feel gratitude in each of the variants of the scenario. For example,

Scenario 1b

A fire starts in someone's house and he becomes trapped. He finds that the window behind him is unlocked and manages to climb through to safety. It is fitting for him to feel grateful to the window.

- 1 It is perfectly fitting to feel grateful to the window.
- 2 It is fitting, but less than perfectly so, to feel grateful to the window.
- 3 It is neither fitting nor unfitting to feel grateful to the window.
- 4 It is unfitting to feel grateful to the window.
- 5 It is extremely unfitting to feel grateful to the window.

Kristján Kristjánsson informed me that some members of the Jubilee Center research team had already tried a questionnaire (about compassion) formulated in this way in some secondary schools in the UK, and had found that "the majority of students (even the relatively bright ones) found this terminology decidedly odd. They did not understand what it means for an emotion to be fitting. 'Emotions are simply felt, aren't they?'" (personal communication).

We might wonder whether, if participants' understanding of emotions is this primitive, it is of any scientific interest at all to probe their understanding of the concept of gratitude (or any other emotion). But if 'fitting' and 'appropriate' are too sophisticated or technical or strange, we have other vocabulary resources to try. What if we asked whether scenario 1b "calls for" gratitude to the window? Or we might ask whether the scenario is "a reason" to feel gratitude to the window, or whether it "makes sense" to feel gratitude to the window in the scenario. And perhaps other vocabulary could be found. In my opinion, such routes should be explored in preference to asking other questions than the question of the research in hopes that reliable data will arise from the confusion.

In its October 2013 incarnation, the vignettes questionnaire instructs the participant that he or she will need about 10 minutes to answer questions about two scenarios with their sets of variants. This seems to me to assume that the participant will answer the questions "off the top of her head" — without reflecting carefully. But since the questionnaire itself follows the conditions proposed in the standard analysis, it can function as a tutorial in the issues surrounding the nature of gratitude. The participant might be asked to take a bit longer to fill out the questionnaire, and to read through the whole thing before beginning to give answers. The pre-reading of the whole questionnaire might help to put each question in perspective. By first seeing a broader range of the issues in the grammar of

gratitude, the participant might have a greater appreciation and a more nuanced view of each individual question. (Since the questionnaire is itself noncommittal about whether any condition of the standard analysis is actually a condition of gratitude, it should not prejudice the participant's answer to the questions. The scenarios only flag the issues raised by the standard analysis; they do not provide doctrine with respect to them.)

Also, on some of the questions, my variant asks the participant to consider some words other than 'gratitude' that might better describe the mental state that would be an appropriate response to this or that variant. This also might stimulate the participant's reflection about gratitude and induce him or her to give more nuanced answers. For example, a respondent might initially think that it makes perfect sense to feel grateful that the window was unlocked, despite the fact that nobody gets credit for having unlocked it. But if that participant is then asked, "Would it be more accurate to say that it makes sense to feel *glad*, or *happy*, or *appreciative*, rather than grateful, that the window was unlocked," the respondent might think, "Well, it is a *little* odd to feel grateful when there's nobody to thank for the benefit."

These stimulants to greater reflectiveness on the part of the tested subjects would induce them to think more like a philosopher. These are some of the techniques by which the philosopher comes up with his or her analysis: careful comparison of diverse cases, and especially variants of a basic scenario; consideration of counterexamples to tentatively held opinions about the grammar of the concept; weighing of alternative terms for mental states that bear some resemblance to gratitude. This raises the question of what the questionnaire is really probing, after all: Is it looking for what the participant thinks about the concept of gratitude "off the top of her head," or is it asking what the participant thinks after careful reflection? It seems to me that if one wants to get at the layman's deeper understanding of what gratitude is, one will want the layman's *considered* opinion.

But of course even if the participants were to take an hour to fill out the revised and expanded questionnaire and given the option of revising their answers on reflection, their reflection would be infinitesimal compared to that of a philosopher who had carefully studied Seneca's *On Favors*, considering each of his examples in turn, reading the contemporary philosophical and psychological literature on the topic, and concocting potential counterexamples to Seneca's and others' remarks about the emotion, and carefully constructing a view of his own in dialogue with other philosophers and psychologists who worked on the issue.

Both "top of the head" intuitions about the concept of gratitude and carefully considered intuitions may be of some interest to a researcher. It might be interesting first to administer the questionnaire in a "top of the head" manner, and then perhaps a week later ask the same subjects to answer the questionnaire in a reflective manner. Both the earlier go through the questionnaire and the reflective activity would presumably deepen the subjects' appreciation of the issues. Again, it might be interesting to administer the questionnaire in the different ways to different sets of subjects, and see if the results differ.

But if the researcher is looking for a concept of the emotion of gratitude such that it is the emotion to which a person with the *virtue* of gratitude is disposed, the researcher will probably be more interested in the more carefully thought out intuitions. Virtues, after all, are norms or ideals, and furthermore *legitimate* norms or ideals — not just random ones or highly personalized ones, or ones of some local population, but ideals that are really worth pursuing. This circling back to the concept of virtue raises the question about the extent to which empirical studies can establish norms for such virtue concepts. To that topic I now briefly turn.

Normative Emotion Dispositions

Aristotle analyzes some of the virtues (for example, courage [*andreia*] and gentleness [*praotês*]) as dispositions to experience emotions. Courage is a disposition to proper fear and confidence, and gentleness is a disposition to proper anger. Thus these virtues are strongly analogous to the virtue of gratitude (being a grateful *person*, as contrasted with being in a state of feeling gratitude). In my opinion, Aristotle's sketch of the normative character of such virtues is right on target. He says, "...the man who feels fear or anger is not praised nor is the man who simply feels anger blamed but the man who feels it *in a certain way*..." (Aristotle 1980 book 2, chapter 5, italics added). "For instance, both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue" (Aristotle 1980, book 2, chapter 6).

This formula assumes a point that Aristotle 1939, book 2, chapter 11, makes very explicit, namely, that emotions have not only quantitative dimensions (say, degrees of vivacity, duration, motive strength, and felt intensity), but also qualitative ones such as I described earlier. They can have right or wrong quantitative dimensions, but also they aim at *kinds* of situations and can get the qualitative aspects of those situations right or wrong. For example, the type of situation that corresponds to gratitude is one in which a benefactor has benevolently benefited a beneficiary with a benefit. It thus has a narrative structure and can be represented in a grammatically complete sentence that represents the situational elements in their logical relations.

The example of a standard analysis of the emotion of gratitude that I offered earlier also laid down some appropriateness conditions for each of the members of this triad: for example, in addition to the benefactor's being benevolently motivated, the benefit has to be really good and the beneficiary needs to be related to the benefactor in a way that can justify an ongoing indebtedness of a sort that creates a personal bond of dependence between the two. Thus genuine gratitude can go wrong in various ways: the grateful person might construe as a benefit something that really is not a benefit, or construe the benefactor as benevolent when in fact her motive in conferring the benefit is malicious, or might be unwise in willing to be in the relation of ongoing indebtedness when such a relationship is inappropriate. Thus Aristotle abstractly lays down the moral normativity of an emotion as one that is felt "at the right times, with reference to the right objects,

towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way” — and perhaps there are other conditions.

Moral normativity differs from the normativity that governs the emotion type — what it takes for an emotion to be a case of gratitude. The latter is the kind of normativity that Lambert, Graham, and Fincham (2009) try to specify, using their “prototype” analysis, and that Gulliford and Morgan try to specify, using their much more promising vignette questionnaires. The question these psychologists ask is, **What is gratitude?** (what are the conditions that, being met, make a mental state a state of gratitude?). In contrast, the question of moral normativity for a type of emotion, the one that Aristotle will answer by saying that the virtuous person is one who feels the emotion in the right way, for the right reasons, towards the right persons, for the right length of time, with the right intensity, etc., is the question, **When is gratitude excellent (virtuous)?** On the Aristotelian understanding, *genuine* gratitude is not always *virtuous* gratitude. That is, a person might feel genuinely grateful, and yet do so less than virtuously, or even viciously.

In a way, McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002), in their efforts to find correlations between the disposition to gratitude on the one hand, and subjective wellbeing, prosociality, and religiousness on the other, are, like Aristotle, studying the moral normativity of gratitude — what it is that makes it *good*. But they don’t distinguish between good and bad genuine gratitude, because they don’t distinguish situations in which it is right to feel genuine gratitude and situations in which it is wrong to do so. They seem to assume that gratitude is just gratitude, and that whatever “moral” normativity it has is *derived* from its regular connection with the *other* dispositions: subjective wellbeing, prosociality, and religiousness.

The Problem of Authority in Normative Research

The virtue of gratitude presumably trades on both kinds of norms that we have identified: the norms for *genuine* gratitude, and the norms for the *virtuousness* of genuine gratitude — the conditions under which genuine gratitude is virtuous. The virtue of gratitude will be the disposition to feel *genuine* (emotional) gratitude *in the right way*.

If we’re looking for the concept of a human *virtue*, then our question is what this virtue *is*, not what somebody *thinks* it is. Lambert et al. and Gulliford & Morgan worry about the normative sloppiness of psychological research with respect to the definition of gratitude, and offer their own approaches as making that definition more precise. They suppose that with a more precise understanding of gratitude as an emotion, the kind of research represented by McCullough et al. 2002 can yield more reliable information about the status of gratitude as a human virtue. Lambert et al. and Gulliford & Morgan have in common that they think we can gain needed clarity about what gratitude as a mental state is by consulting the masses — say, the college or high school students whose intuitions their studies probe for a concept of gratitude.

But who are the masses, that *their* intuitions should determine what gratitude *is*? High schoolers and university students — or, indeed, the adult population of the U.S. or the

U.K. — are surely not qualified to serve as authorities on either of these kinds of norm. It seems to me transparent that the *most* we can expect from research in the style of Lambert et al. and the Gulliford-Morgan vignettes is *sociological* knowledge about how the masses think about gratitude. This kind of research is interesting for its potential to inform us how the masses think, but it should not be regarded as a source of information about what gratitude is, or what makes it humanly excellent.

McCullough et al., by contrast, assume that we all know well enough what gratitude is, and seek to gather evidence that gratitude is virtuous by showing correlations between it and subjective wellbeing, prosociality, and religiousness. But this strategy just pushes the normative question a stage back: what is it that makes subjective wellbeing, prosociality, and religiousness good? Any competent philosopher will point out that subjective wellbeing, prosociality, and religiousness can all take non-virtuous or even vicious forms. All three of these qualities can be found in the wicked and the mentally ill. And so the question remains: What is the difference between *virtuous* subjective wellbeing, prosociality, and religiousness, and their non-virtuous counterparts, and just how are they related to the virtues?

If empirical research is constitutionally unfit to answer the two kinds of normative questions that arise in connection with the virtue of gratitude, because its subjects lack the authority to establish the norms, or because it must presuppose some conception of the virtuous with which they correlate gratitude, how are we to investigate these two kinds of norms? I think the grain of truth in the practices of empirical psychology that I have examined is that the norms for what gratitude is and for the conditions under which it is virtuous to feel it must be found in our practices, in some sense of “our.” The big question, then, is, Who are “we,” and what gives “us” the authority to propose answers to the normative questions?

The college and high school students whose intuitions are queried in the empirical methods that we have examined are unlikely to be central to this “we.” They are targets, not ideals, of moral education. With nurture, experience, and critical reflection they may one day be wise, but until they have received this formation, “we” will not consult them in questions about norms of human functioning. The “we” must be an elite, qualified by reflection, experience, historical understanding, and a long discipline of critical debate, to venture answers to the normative questions.

Ultimately, the answers must arise out of an understanding of what a human life looks like in the practices, emotions, perceptions, and thinking processes of the best human beings. To be normatively regulative, such an understanding must meet two further conditions: First, the best human beings must be conceived as whole, integrated personalities. The virtuous personality or character is an integral whole made up of many virtues. Since the virtues are interdependent, we always risk distortion if we examine a single virtue like gratitude in isolation from the others. A normative understanding of gratitude will involve “placing” it and its twin virtue generosity in the larger context of human virtues such as justice, humility, wisdom, temperance, courage, faith, hope, and love. Second, the answers to our normative questions must arise out of a coherent world-

view, a synoptic understanding that grasps the larger context of the issues surrounding gratitude and generosity, a world-view that sees human beings in the larger context of creation, and creation in the light of its metaphysical basis.

Traditions of wisdom and of ideals of human functioning have arisen historically and have been debated, refined, and adjudicated by thinkers who represent them. These thinkers are traditionally known as philosophers — lovers and seekers of wisdom — and theologians — thinkers about God.

In my opinion, the best way to seek the norms of human excellence is by frank membership in one of the great moral-metaphysical traditions. It is to practice moral philosophy and its allied psychology within the compass of a way of thinking about human life that places it in the broader context of a deep “anthropology,” and enjoys a long history of concerted seeking, evolved practices, experience, and critical reflection, matured through critical debate. Such a tradition is the product of many minds, a work of a rich history. An obvious example of such a tradition, and one in which gratitude is especially at home, is the Jewish and Christian one. Other examples are the Confucian and the Stoic. The tendency of the Templeton Foundation to encourage work on the virtues that draws simultaneously on psychology, theology, and philosophy seems to me analogous to or continuous with this larger vision for normative inquiry.

The positive psychology movement, at least as represented by Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, (see also J. Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis*) has the commendable policy of seeking the wisdom of historical traditions in its efforts to conceptualize the human virtues. But I think these efforts sacrifice much of the richness (and therefore of the wisdom) of the individual traditions when they try to syncretize them, and through a too hasty effort to explain them in terms of current science. Peterson and Seligman acknowledge the importance of a deep anthropology, a metaphysics of the person, a coherent world-view, in their aspiration after a “deep theory” [REFERENCE] to support the norms sketched in their *Handbook*, and they admit to possessing no such a deep theory. The rather desultory and amateurish character of their “classification,” we might suspect, is due to this lack, and to their effort to avoid commitment to any particular major tradition.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper I said that I share the concern of Gulliford, Morgan, and Kristjánsson (2013) that “philosophical analyses of [gratitude pay] insufficient attention to what people actually have in mind when they speak or think about gratitude.” I said this in the context of a paper about studying the *virtue* of gratitude, and I have in mind the practical concern of the Templeton Foundation that the study of the virtues should eventuate in a dissemination and enhancement of the virtues in society. In the ancient world and until fairly recently, the study of ethics and moral psychology was conceived as part of a project of education in the virtues. It was not merely an academic, but also a practical, political, and spiritual exercise. An important aspect of that project was to understand the minds of those whose conception of the good life and of the virtues of that

life was immature and therefore in need of correction and development. If we hope to inculcate genuine virtues, it is crucial to know the extent and kinds of shortfall from wisdom and virtue that affect the target population. This, as I see it, is the important utility of the kinds of studies conducted by Lambert, Graham, and Fincham, and Gulliford & Morgan; and it is certainly one to which contemporary “virtue ethicists” pay insufficient attention.³

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APPENDIX 1: Sample Gulliford-Morgan gratitude vignette, October 2013 version

Scenario 1a.

A fire starts in your house and you become trapped. Another person finds you and rescues you.

Q. You are grateful to this person for her help.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

*Please indicate the degree of gratitude you feel on the scale below by placing a **vertical line** on the scale that corresponds to the amount of gratitude you would feel:*

|-----|
Not at all *Most grateful*
grateful *you could feel*

Q. You *should* be grateful to this person for her help.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Scenario 1b.

A fire starts in your house and you become trapped. You find that the window behind you is unlocked and you manage to climb through to safety.

Q. You *should* be grateful **to** the window for saving your life.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Q. You *are* grateful **to** the window for saving your life.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Please indicate the degree of gratitude you feel on the scale below:

|-----|
Not at all *Most grateful*
grateful *you could feel*

Q. You are grateful **for** the window for saving your life.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Please indicate the degree of gratitude you feel on the scale below:

|-----|
Not at all *Most grateful*
grateful *you could feel*

Q. You *should* be grateful **for** the window for saving your life.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Q. In the case of the window, are you grateful to something else for saving your life?

Yes No

If applicable, please explain who or what you are grateful towards here:

If applicable, please indicate the degree of gratitude you feel towards this other person or thing on the scale below:

|-----|
 Not at all grateful Most grateful you could feel

Scenario 1c.

A fire starts in your house and you become trapped. A fire-fighter finds you and rescues you.

Q. You are **not** grateful to the fire-fighter as she is simply fulfilling the requirements of her job.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Please indicate the degree of gratitude you feel on the scale below:

|-----|
 Not at all grateful Most grateful you could feel

Q. You *should* **not** be grateful to the fire-fighter as she is simply fulfilling the requirements of her job.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Scenario 1d.

A fire starts in your house and you become trapped. A stranger who is walking past the house finds you and rescues you. She risks her own life by doing so as the fire has become quite fierce.

Q. You *should* be grateful to this stranger for her help.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Q. You *are* grateful to this stranger for her help.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Please indicate the degree of gratitude you feel on the scale below:

|-----|
Not at all *Most grateful*
grateful *you could feel*

Q. You are more grateful to this person than the fire-fighter as there is a bigger risk involved.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Please indicate the degree of gratitude you feel on the scale below:

|-----|
Not at all *Most grateful*
grateful *you could feel*

Q. You *should* be more grateful to this person than the fire-fighter as there is a bigger risk involved.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Q. You *are* more grateful to this person than the fire-fighter as it was not her job to help you.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Please indicate the degree of gratitude you feel on the scale below:

|-----|
Not at all *Most grateful*
grateful *you could feel*

Q. You *should* be more grateful to this person than the fire-fighter as it was not her job to help you.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Please explain the decisions for your answers to scenario 1d here:

Scenario 1e.

A fire starts in your house and you become trapped. A stranger who is walking past the house tries to rescue you. However, she is not able to reach you and eventually has to give up. A fire-fighter has to rescue you both instead.

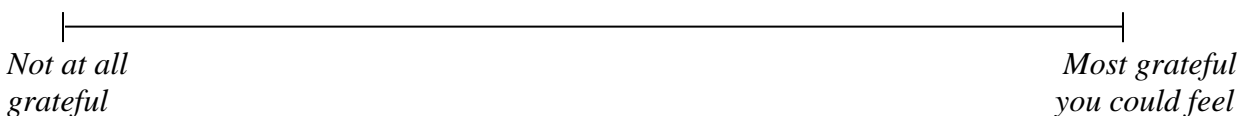
Q. You *should* not be grateful to the person who tried to rescue you because she didn't succeed.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Q. You *are* not grateful to the person who tried to rescue you because she didn't succeed.

1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly disagree

Please indicate the degree of gratitude you feel on the scale below:



Appendix 2 (a proposed variant of the Gulliford-Morgan vignette questionnaire)⁴

Please read through the following scenarios prior to answering the questions; then rank the following scenarios with respect to whether it would make sense for someone to respond by feeling gratitude:

Scenario 1a

A fire starts in a person's house and he becomes trapped. Another person finds him and rescues him.

1 It makes perfectly good sense⁵ for him to feel grateful toward his rescuer.

⁴ This variant attempts to use the scenario format while avoiding the subject's possible confusion of the question whether *he* would feel grateful, with the question whether *it makes sense* to feel grateful in variants of the scenario. With the instruction to read through the questionnaire before trying to answer the questions, and with the added questions that give the subject an alternative to the language of gratitude, this questionnaire attempts to distinguish those subjects who have a different concept of gratitude from those who merely use the language of gratitude loosely on occasion.

⁵ Gulliford and Morgan tried this more direct and simple approach to testing lay concepts of gratitude, using the words 'fitting' and 'appropriate,' and found that many of the subjects did not understand the questions. I here propose phrases using 'makes sense' as perhaps more widely understood. Another possibility would be phrases using 'is a good reason [to feel grateful].' The questionnaire might start out with a little training session:

"For example, most people would think that if someone angrily pokes you in the eye with a sharp stick, it would make *no sense at all* to feel grateful to that person. But if someone you love gives you a lovely gift that was obviously chosen with great care just for you, it makes perfect sense to feel grateful to him or her."

- 2 It makes sense for him to feel grateful toward his rescuer.
- 3 It neither does nor doesn't make sense for him to feel grateful toward his rescuer.
- 4 It makes little sense for him to feel grateful toward his rescuer.
- 5 It makes no sense at all for him to feel grateful toward his rescuer.

Scenario 1b

A fire starts in someone's house and he becomes trapped. He finds that the window behind him is unlocked and manages to climb through to safety.

- 1 It makes perfectly good sense to feel grateful to the window.
- 2 It makes sense to feel grateful to the window.
- 3 It neither does nor doesn't make sense to feel grateful to the window.
- 4 It makes little sense to feel grateful to the window.
- 5 It makes no sense at all to feel grateful to the window.

- 1 It makes perfectly good sense to feel grateful *for* the window.
- 2 It makes sense to feel grateful *for* the window.
- 3 It neither does nor doesn't make sense to feel grateful *for* the window.
- 4 It makes little sense to feel grateful *for* the window.
- 5 It makes no sense at all to feel grateful *for* the window.

2) If he feels grateful for the window, then he must be thinking of someone who provided the window.

Yes No

3) If he feels grateful for the window, then he must be thinking of someone who provided the window *for him*.

Yes No

4) If it makes little sense for him to feel grateful for the window if he's not thinking of someone who provided the window, it would make more sense for him to feel *glad* that the window was there.

Yes No

5) If it makes little sense for him to feel grateful for the window if he's not thinking of someone who provided the window, it would make more sense for him to *appreciate* that the window was there.

Yes No

Scenario 1c.

A fire starts in a person's house and he becomes trapped. A fire fighter finds him and rescues him.

- 1 It makes perfectly good sense to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.
- 2 It makes sense to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.
- 3 It neither does nor doesn't make sense to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.
- 4 It makes little sense to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.
- 5 It makes no sense at all to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.

1) A fire starts in a person's house and he becomes trapped. A fire fighter finds him and rescues him, but it is clear to him that the fire-fighter has no interest in him, but is only doing her job.

- 1 It makes perfectly good sense to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.
- 2 It makes sense to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.
- 3 It neither does nor doesn't make sense to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.
- 4 It makes little sense to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.
- 5 It makes no sense at all to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.

2) A fire starts in a person's house and he becomes trapped. A fire fighter finds him and rescues him, but it is clear to him that the fire-fighter has no interest in him, but is selfishly trying to be the hero on the evening news.

- 1 It makes perfectly good sense to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.
- 2 It makes sense to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.
- 3 It neither does nor doesn't make sense to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.
- 4 It makes little sense to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.
- 5 It makes no sense at all to feel grateful to the fire-fighter.

3) If it makes little sense for a person to feel grateful to a fire fighter who is merely doing her duty and does not care about him, would it make more sense for him to feel *glad* that the fire-fighter was doing her duty?

Yes No

Scenario 1d.

A fire starts in someone's house and he becomes trapped. A stranger who is walking past the house finds him and rescues him. She risks her own life by doing so, as the fire has become quite fierce, so it is very clear that the stranger cares about *him*.

- 1 It makes perfectly good sense to feel grateful to the stranger.
- 2 It makes sense to feel grateful to the stranger.
- 3 It neither does nor doesn't make sense to feel grateful to the stranger.
- 4 It makes little sense to feel grateful to the stranger.
- 5 It makes no sense at all to feel grateful to the stranger.

Scenario 1e.

A fire starts in someone's house and he becomes trapped. A stranger who is walking past the house tries to rescue him, showing that she cares about him, but is unable to reach him and eventually a fire fighter has to rescue both him and the stranger.

- 1 It makes perfectly good sense to feel grateful to the stranger.
- 2 It makes sense to feel grateful to the stranger.

- 3 It neither does nor doesn't make sense to feel grateful to the stranger.
- 4 It makes little sense to feel grateful to the stranger.
- 5 It makes no sense at all to feel grateful to the stranger.

1) If it is fitting for the person who was trapped in the fire to feel gratitude to the stranger even though the stranger didn't succeed in rescuing him, is there something *else* that he is grateful for — for example, for the stranger's *intention* or *thoughtfulness*?

Yes

No