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The Dual Nature of Gratitude: Understanding Gratitude as Both a Virtue and a Duty

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**The Dual Nature of Gratitude: Understanding
Gratitude as Both a Virtue and a Duty**

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Mary Helen Brickhouse

May 2019

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Abstract

We all understand what it means when someone says they are grateful. Sometimes they are describing something internal such as a feeling or an attitude towards something. Other times they are describing an act of gratitude such as a return favor. Sometimes they express gratitude for a state of affairs. Other times they express gratitude to a person for providing some benefit to them. Yet we can always piece together what is being communicated. The problem, however, is that these various ways of describing gratitude pull us in opposite directions and it is not obvious how these descriptions all relate back to the same concept.

In this dissertation I first attempt to distinguish gratitude from other closely related concepts such as thankfulness or appreciation. I suggest that gratitude is always directed to a benefactor while the object of thankfulness is a state of affairs. Even if we agree that gratitude is directed to a benefactor for some benefit, does the gratitude take the form of a feeling or a duty to act? It is not immediately clear. I suggest that gratitude is best understood as both a virtue and a duty because the content of virtue is best understood, at least in part, in terms of principles.

The principles of gratitude help us to distinguish gratitude from other closely related virtues such as justice or generosity, but we can only fully understand the virtue of gratitude by appealing to the ideal of gratitude. The ideal of gratitude involves more than merely acting on the right principles. It involves acting on the right principles in the right way, at the right time, and knowing when certain principles do or do not apply. At the end of the dissertation I apply this account of gratitude to a difficult case involving egg donation between sisters. In doing so I show how this view of gratitude is able to capture many of our intuitions about gratitude in a coherent and unified way.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Most of us have an ordinary understanding of gratitude. We know what it means when someone says that she is grateful for her family, for instance. But when we step back and think about all the different ways we use ‘gratitude’, it is doubtful that we have a clear understanding of what gratitude is. In our common usage, ‘gratitude’ can have a wide array of meanings. Sometimes we use it to mean relief, other times it could mean something such as indebtedness, thankfulness, or gladness. It seems strange that the same word could cover so much ground and yet we still usually understand what is being communicated in each of these instances.

Sometimes we understand gratitude to mean happiness or gladness, such as when we say, “I am so grateful that the rain held off until after the wedding.” But this cannot be what gratitude means because then gratitude would be far too demanding—we would have to be grateful about everything that made us happy or benefited us in any way. Other times we understand gratitude as thankfulness such as when we say, “I am grateful for this time with my family” or “I am so grateful that you are willing to fill in for me. I was desperate!” In the same way, those sentences could also mean that you are appreciative—“I appreciate this time with my family” or “I really appreciate that you are willing to fill in for me.” But sometimes when we say, “I am so grateful that you are willing to fill in for me,” what we really mean is “I owe you one.” So instead of, or perhaps in addition to, meaning that you are thankful or appreciative, you may mean that you are indebted to that person. For one final example, sometimes we might say “I am so grateful I avoided hitting that deer!” but what we really mean is I am relieved I did not hit that deer.

These examples are meant to highlight many of the different ways we use ‘gratitude’ and understand what gratitude is. Some of these interpretations may come closer to capturing our

intuitions about gratitude than others but the very fact that we use gratitude in so many ways suggests that we, generally, do not have totally consistent intuitions about gratitude. To whom is it appropriate to show gratitude? Sometimes we show gratitude to people who are merely doing their job—as in a case of a firefighter saving your daughter from a burning building—but other times we do not. We generally think it is inappropriate for a student to express gratitude to a professor for giving the student an A on an assignment even though both the professor and the firefighter are merely doing their jobs. It is not immediately clear what distinguishes these cases such that we would have opposing intuitions.

Must the act for which we are grateful have been done intentionally? Generally, we direct our gratitude towards the person who has knowingly and willingly provided a benefit to us. But there are a few cases where we direct our gratitude towards people who had no intention of benefiting us. When you are finally accepted into a program after being on the waiting list you might say “I am so grateful that person dropped out and therefore opened up a spot for me!” The person who declined the offer was not intending to help you. You probably did not factor into that person’s reasoning for declining the offer. You were incidentally benefitted and yet you still express gratitude.

Those are but two examples of our inconsistent intuitions about gratitude and yet when we are faced with a situation where we think you ought to show gratitude, these kinds of questions are likely to arise. Our intuitions about how to respond to such questions are constantly shifting so it is quite difficult to pin down what the appropriate grateful response would be. This dissertation is an attempt to explore some of these interesting questions and to think through some of our competing intuitions about gratitude.

My approach to thinking about gratitude reflects my approach to philosophy more generally. Philosophy is a worthwhile pursuit because it is a way of making sense of the world around us. As philosophers, we look around and see concepts or phenomena to be explained. We seek that explanation because we are curious but also because it will form a clearer understanding which will help us to interact with the world and each other. I understand moral philosophy, in particular, as an attempt to understand how we should treat those around us. That begins by looking around and examining the behavior of ourselves and others. In the same way, my approach to understanding gratitude starts with identifying cases in which someone experiences gratitude. When faced with a case, we often find ourselves with certain intuitions or making certain judgments about, for instance, what gratitude requires, the kinds of attitudes a grateful person should have, or what characteristics make for a good benefactor. Sometimes these intuitions and judgments are made without reflection; they are informed by how we were raised, experiences we have had in the past, or even how we are feeling in the moment. This inevitably leads to conflicting intuitions between people. These conflicts, however, reveal how rich and complex the nature of gratitude is. From this complexity we can start to develop general principles and color in the ideal of gratitude in such a way that we can begin to make sense of these competing intuitions.

Why Gratitude?

My interest in gratitude stems from an experience I had with my sister. When I was in college, my sister asked me to donate my eggs to her so that she could start her family. She was unable to produce her own high-quality eggs which meant that several rounds of fertility treatments had been unsuccessful. I agreed to give her my eggs and ultimately she became

pregnant. Afterwards she felt an obligation to thank me for helping her to start a family, but she struggled to find the right way to do this. At the advice of the fertility clinic, she sent me a check along with a note thanking me.

The check made me uncomfortable. It sat on my desk for weeks until my dad called me to tell me to cash it. The check, he reasoned, was the only way my sister had to thank me for what I had done for her. She could not possibly do the same thing for me in the future so I should graciously accept the check. Eventually I did cash the check, but I was full of questions. Was a check the *only* way my sister had to thank me? Did she even need to thank me at all? Would I have felt more comfortable accepting a check from a stranger? These questions led me to start thinking about the nature of gratitude—What is gratitude, how should one show gratitude, is gratitude the appropriate response upon receipt of any benefit, is there something that makes a good benefactor? This dissertation, then, is an attempt to break down the nature of gratitude so that when we return to a fictionalized version of this case in Chapter 6, we will have the tools and understanding necessary to tackle such a complex case.

An Overview of the Dissertation

In Chapter 2 I lay the historical groundwork for how we understand the concept of gratitude. The chapter itself is structured around three questions that philosophers have attempted to answer in coming to an understanding of the nature of gratitude. The first question asks, “What is Gratitude?” Contemporary philosophers generally understand gratitude as being either a duty or a virtue. This disagreement has its roots in the historical disagreement among philosophers about the fundamental nature of gratitude. By tracing the genesis of this disagreement, we can develop a deeper understanding of the state of the current literature. The

second question concerns how we ought to show gratitude. The answer to this question hinges on a particular philosopher's answer to the first question. Merely knowing the nature of gratitude does not inform us about how to go about showing gratitude so philosophers have generally tried to provide some guidelines about how to show one's gratitude. The final question I take up in this chapter is "What makes a good benefactor?". The answer to this question helps us to identify instances where gratitude is an appropriate response. For each of these questions I lay out a chronological progression of how these questions have been answered. Structuring the chapter in this way allows us to both identify patterns of thought more easily and focus on how the ideas about particular aspects of gratitude have changed over time.

The third chapter has two main aims. The first aim is to make some distinctions between terms such as gratitude, thankfulness, and appreciation. We generally use these terms interchangeably and succeed in getting our point across. In using these terms interchangeably, however, we are collapsing two distinct phenomena: being grateful *to* someone *for* some benefit and being grateful *for* some state of affairs. I understand gratitude as taking the former structure. If gratitude is understood as being directed *to* someone for some benefit, there is some question about to whom gratitude may appropriately be directed. This is the second aim of the chapter. Can I be grateful to an inanimate object that provides me some benefit, such as a tree that provides me shade in the desert? Can I be grateful to an animal that saves my life? Can I be grateful to someone who has died? The answers to these questions are far from obvious but are worth considering if we are to understand gratitude as being directed *to* someone.

In Chapter 4 I put forward my own view of the nature of gratitude. Contemporary philosophers generally understand gratitude as being either primarily a duty or primarily a virtue. For those who understand gratitude as a duty, gratitude is something that is owed to a benefactor.

Those who understand gratitude as a virtue, on the other hand, put more emphasis on how the agent experiences her gratitude. Both views highlight important aspects of the nature of gratitude but by putting more emphasis on one aspect than the other, neither view is able to fully account for our wide range of intuitions about gratitude. My view is meant as an attempt to bridge this gap. On my view, gratitude is both a duty and a virtue. This is because the nature of some virtues, such as gratitude, is best understood, at least in part, in terms of principles. The content of the virtue of gratitude, for example, will include some mid-level principle such as “acknowledge your benefactor” or “do not intentionally aim to harm your benefactor.” These principles give shape to the virtue but are not intended to be hard-and-fast rules. “Acknowledging your benefactor” is a sufficiently vague principle. It says nothing about *how* to acknowledge your benefactor. When we consider the ideal of gratitude, we can begin to fill in more of the gaps. The ideally grateful person will not acknowledge her benefactor by embarrassing him or by hurting his feelings, for example. Together, the mid-level principles and the ideal shape the virtue of gratitude in such a way that we can now more easily account for our differing intuitions about the nature of gratitude and what gratitude requires.

Having principles and the ideal of gratitude only helpful insofar as we know when these duties of gratitude are generated. In Chapter 5, I take up five questions that might arise when deciding whether or not gratitude is required. In most paradigm cases of gratitude, the benefactor intentionally provides a benefit to you, you are actually benefitted by that gift or favor, you both wanted and accepted the benefit, the benefit provided was the result of the benefactor’s action (that is to say, you were not benefitted by the benefactor’s failure to act in some way), and the benefactor’s action was supererogatory. What happens when one of these features is missing? Do

I owe gratitude to the person who does not harm me, for instance? In this chapter I consider whether gratitude is the required response when any one of these features is missing.

In Chapter 6, I take the lessons from Chapters 4 and 5 and apply them to a fictionalized version of the case I mentioned earlier involving my sister. First I consider whether this case has the features mentioned in Chapter 5 to see whether gratitude is required at all in such a case. I come to the conclusion that gratitude is, in fact, appropriate in such a case. If gratitude is a required response to accepting donated eggs from one's sister, how is one to know how to show that gratitude? When applied to the case, the principles and ideal of gratitude introduced in Chapter 4 can help us explain why a check may not have been the best way to express gratitude and can point us towards other, more ideal, ways of expressing gratitude. In the end, the view of gratitude put forward in Chapter 4 should be able to account for our various intuitions about gratitude in this case.

Finally, In Chapter 7 I draw an analogy between gratitude and punishment. These two concepts, I suggest, share a common structure. Just as gratitude is directed to someone who has benefitted you, punishment is directed to someone who has harmed you. Since they have a similar structure, we have some reason to think that what justifies one will justify the other.

Gratitude is often assumed to be justified. When self-help books encourage us to be more grateful, they do not tend to spend a lot of time explaining *why* gratitude is a good thing worth pursuing. With punishment, on the other hand, a lot of work has gone in to justifying particular acts or practices of punishment. In this chapter I apply the arguments generally used to justify punishment to gratitude to see if it will produce analogous arguments justifying gratitude.

Chapter 2: Historical Conceptions of Gratitude

Gratitude has played an important role in the development of moral thought. For centuries philosophers have grappled with understanding the nature of gratitude and understanding how it informs how we ought to treat others. Plato was among the earliest philosophers to leave record of their accounts of gratitude. His primary focus was on understanding the gratitude one owes to his or her city. The focus in the literature, however, quickly shifted from thinking about showing gratitude to our city to showing gratitude to the people around you. As the literature shifted towards thinking about the interpersonal nature of gratitude, attempts to answer the same three questions appear again and again.

The first question that is regularly addressed is: What is gratitude? We generally agree that gratitude is a good thing—something we ought to have, something we ought to show to others—but there is significant disagreement about whether gratitude is an emotion, a virtue, an obligation, or something else. As we will see, this contemporary disagreement has roots in the ways gratitude has historically be understood. The second question concerns how to show gratitude. Knowing what gratitude is may not tell you exactly how to show gratitude or what is morally required in showing gratitude. The answer to this question generally hinges on the author's answer to the first question. If gratitude is an obligation, for example, showing gratitude might involve reciprocated exchanges of gifts. The answers to this question provide at least a partial explanation for our various practices of gratitude. The final thematic question is: What makes a good benefactor? It is generally agreed that the character of the benefactor and his intentions in bestowing the gift on you will have an impact on the kind and extent of gratitude

you should show him. Tracing the evolution of the answer to this question will help us to think about *when* gratitude is owed.

In this chapter I address these questions one at a time. For each of these three questions I will lay out a chronological progression of how these questions have historically been answered starting with Plato and ending with Kant. Structuring the chapter in this way allows for us to more easily identify patterns of thought as the concept of gratitude as developed. It also helps us to focus on the evolution of distinct aspects of gratitude and how those have changed over time.

What is Gratitude?

One overarching question that has historically been at the center of discussion of gratitude is: What is the nature of gratitude? Contemporary philosophers disagree about whether gratitude the nature of gratitude is primarily a virtue or a duty. On the one hand, gratitude is often thought of as an obligation to *show* one's appreciation by reciprocating good deeds done for you or gifts given to you. On the other hand, gratitude is also considered to be a character trait that we ought to develop in ourselves. We ought to develop a habit of feeling appreciation for those who have helped us in some way. The disagreement contemporary philosophers have stems from the historical disagreement philosophers have had about the nature of gratitude over the course of centuries. In this section we will we will advance chronologically so that we can more clearly see how these two views have developed.

Plato

Plato attempts to answer the question "What is the nature of gratitude" in the *Crito*. In this dialogue, Socrates has been imprisoned and sentenced to die for corrupting the youth when

his friend Crito offers to help him break out and go free. Socrates argues that it would be wrong for him to escape from prison with Crito because he has certain duties to the city of Athens. Athens married his mother and father, therefore allowing him to come to be; it nurtured and educated him; and it gave Socrates, as well as all the other citizens of Athens, “a share of all the good things we could.”¹ Socrates has eagerly accepted these ‘gifts’ from the state. At any point during his seventy years he presumably could have left Athens for any other city. Socrates, however, deemed the laws to be fair and so decided that Athens was a good place to live and raise his children.

Because Socrates freely accepted these benefits from the state, and knew the punishments for breaking its laws, it is his duty now to show his gratitude to Athens by facing the consequences of his actions—even though doing so will result in his death. Let us briefly consider Socrates’ other options. Running from the laws of Athens that had done so much to protect him and nurture him for the sake of saving himself would signal a lack of gratitude. If Socrates were to do that, we might think that he was failing to show gratitude when gratitude was due, but he is not therefore expressing *ingratitude*. Socrates might still appreciate everything Athens had done for him but flee anyway. If, however, Socrates were to leave Athens out of hatred for what the laws of Athens were doing to him, that might then be considered ingratitude. In that moment, Socrates would not be appreciating what Athens had done, he would be experiencing anger and perhaps even resentment. In any event, Socrates believes he must express gratitude to Athens which means he must stay and face his punishments.

¹ Plato, *Five Dialogues*, 51d.

For Plato, then, gratitude is a duty to recognize and show appreciation for the benefits someone has bestowed on you even if that requires putting your own desires aside. Socrates recognizes the benefits Athens has bestowed on him and remaining in Athens is the only way he would be able to show his gratitude to the city. Athens had done so much to benefit Socrates and so now, when the tables have turned and Athens now needs something from Socrates, Socrates must stay and repay his debt to the city. If he were to escape with Crito, he would be failing to show the proper amount and form of gratitude to the city that raised him.

In Plato we can already start to see how the two views of the nature of gratitude will develop. On the one hand, Plato seems to think that gratitude is a virtuous character trait—Socrates acknowledges the benefits the city has bestowed on him even though it would be easier to be selfish by taking the benefits and fleeing the city when the agreement is no longer beneficial for Socrates. On the other hand, Plato clearly thinks that Socrates has a duty to show his gratitude to Athens for the benefits he has received *even if* Socrates, personally, would rather flee than stay and face certain death.

Aristotle

Aristotle sought to generalize Plato's idea of the state being the object of gratitude to our friends being the object of our gratitude. The nature of the gratitude we show our friends depends in large part on the nature of our friendship. Consider these two types of friendship: friendship of utility and friendship of virtue. Friendships of utility are characterized by being mutually

beneficial to those in the relationship.² Suppose you and I have a friendship of utility and you provide a benefit to me voluntarily. According to Aristotle, I ought, if I can, pay back the equivalent of what I have received.³ This is because our friendship of utility hinges on our friendship being mutually beneficial. If you provide a benefit to me and I do nothing in return, our friendship is one-sided. In order to maintain an equal balance in our friendship, I must repay the equivalent of what I have received. This suggests that the nature of gratitude within friendships of utility is more like a duty. I have an obligation to repay benefits bestowed on me in order to maintain the balance of our friendship.

Friendships of virtue, on the other hand, are characterized by an eagerness to benefit each other since no one objects to being loved or being benefitted by another.⁴ I understand this to mean that in friendships of virtue, *repaying* the benefit is not what is most important because the friendship is not about keeping tabs on who owes what to whom. Rather, the friendship should be marked by a willingness to provide benefits to each other for the sake of the relationship. Gratitude in these cases would be characterized by a commitment to the relationship rather than a commitment to coming out even. This suggests that the nature of gratitude within friendships of virtue is, as the name suggests, virtue. Consider what Aristotle says about virtuous actions:

Actions done in accordance with virtue are noble and done for the sake of what is noble. The generous person will give for the sake of what is noble and in the correct way—to the right people, in the right amounts, at the right time, and so on, with the other qualifications that attach to correct giving. And this he will do with pleasure, or at least without pain, because what is done in accordance with virtue is pleasant or painless, and certainly not painful.⁵

² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.13.

³ Aristotle, VIII.13.

⁴ Aristotle, VIII.13.

⁵ Aristotle, IV.1.

In friendships of virtue, the beneficiary will *want* to reciprocate that kindness in the right way—to the right people, in the right amounts, at the right time—because he wants to honor his friendship, not simply because he is obligated.

Seneca

While Seneca would agree with Plato and Aristotle so far, he was worried about which kinds of relationships require gratitude. In friendships of utility or friendships of virtue, it is easy to see why gratitude would be a proper response. Seneca was worried about a slightly different question: should you show gratitude to *anyone* who provides a benefit to you or should you only show gratitude to those of equal or higher status to your own?⁶ Typically when we think of a benefactor, we think of someone with significant resources to spare who chooses to share some of those resources with someone with fewer resources for that person's own sake. We think, for instance, of kings who were the benefactors of artists. Generally, we do not think of the artists as being able to be benefactors of the king. But Seneca did not think this seemed right. He was worried about a case such as the following: Consider a slave who could not be bribed to betray his master's secrets by any of the offers of a tyrant, who was not terrified by any threats, nor overpowered by any tortures, but who, as far as he was able, placed his questioners upon a wrong scent, and paid for his loyalty with his life.⁷ In this case, according to Seneca, the slave master should show gratitude to his slave. The slave, despite being of lower social status and having

⁶ Seneca, *On Benefits*, III.19.

⁷ Seneca, III.19.

fewer resources than his master, provided the slave master with a significant benefit—saving his life. For this the slave master should respond with gratitude.

Showing gratitude, while certainly a good thing to do, is not, according to Seneca, necessarily obligatory on the part of the beneficiary when the beneficiary has been put in a position that he has not asked for. The slave master, in Seneca's example, did not ask his slave to save his life and yet the slave did it anyway. Seneca is much more interested in spelling out what a good benefactor looks like. In doing this, he makes it clear that a benefactor should *want* to help his beneficiary for that person's own sake and therefore not expect anything in return. This suggests that he does not see gratitude as something that is *owed* to a benefactor. It is something that is good to do, it is nice to show gratitude to your benefactor, but a benefactor should not *expect* to be repaid such as we might expect in Aristotle's friendships of utility. Gratitude, then, is supererogatory and Seneca would certainly not consider it a duty.

Aquinas

In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas develops three rules of gratitude. Failure to meet any one of these requirements is a failure of gratitude. The first rule of being grateful is to recognize the favor received.⁸ If you fail to even recognize that a benefit has been bestowed on you, this shows a moral failing on your part—perhaps you are too self-absorbed, too entitled, or lack empathy. The second rule is to express one's appreciation and thanks.⁹ Expressing your appreciation and thanks shows your benefactor that you recognize the favor and appreciate what

⁸ Aquinas, T., *Summa Theologiae*, II.II.q.106.

⁹ Aquinas, T., II.II.q.106.

they have done for you. The third rule is to repay the favor at a suitable place and time according to one's means. We do so by repaying the favor both when it would most benefit the benefactor and in a way that is suitable for your means. These three rules together constitute a fully grateful response, according to Aquinas.

This account of gratitude requires both proper attitudes of gratitude—recognizing when a benefit has been bestowed on you, appreciating the benefit, appreciating the benefactor—and outward expressions of your gratitude to your benefactor. Both aspects of gratitude are important on his view. If one fails to recognize the favor or if one fails to appreciate what his benefactor has done for him, that is a lack of gratitude. If one fails to repay the favor, that also signals a lack of gratitude. It is important to note, however, that neither of these failures reaches the level of ingratitude. This is because one can fail to repay a favor or fail to recognize a favor without also directing feelings of anger or resentment to the benefactor. Aquinas does not, however, insist on sincerity when he insists that gratitude requires thanking your benefactor. It is clear that you must recognize the gift and thank your benefactor for the gift, but it is not required that you muster any particular positive feelings towards the benefactor or the gift.

Hobbes

Hobbes introduces a novel way of thinking about gratitude. Until this point, gratitude had been thought of, at least partially, as a virtue. The ideally grateful person would be appreciative or want to further a relationship, especially if the benefactor had acted from a desire to help as opposed to acting from self-interested reasons. Hobbes, however, takes a different approach. He does not believe the motivations of the benefactor should play any role in determining how grateful one ought to be to their benefactor. This is because he believes that humans almost

always act for self-interested reasons.¹⁰ No benefactor, according to Hobbes, “gives except with the intention of bringing good to *himself*, because giving is voluntary, and the aim of each voluntary act is the good of the person whose act it is.”¹¹ Even those benefactors who claim to be motivated purely by a desire to help others almost always act for self-interested reasons.

Those benefactors who claim to be motivated purely by a desire to help others act because it makes them feel good to help others or they think they will be rewarded in the afterlife for helping others. There is no difference between the person who acts from a desire to help you for your own sake and one who acts from self-interested reasons since both ultimately decided that providing a benefit to you was in their best interest. Since benefactors act more or less from their own self-interest, it is important that for “a man who receives benefit from another out of mere grace should try to bring it about that the giver of the benefit doesn’t come to have reasonable cause to regret his goodwill.”¹² This, according to Hobbes, is the law of nature regarding gratitude. Failure to act on this law of nature is considered ingratitude. Gratitude, then, for Hobbes is a weak duty. One has a duty to reciprocate a benefit *only if* a failure to reciprocate would give your benefactor reasonable cause to regret providing that benefit to you.

Hume

Hume’s account of gratitude is a direct response to Hobbes. For Hobbes, all human action is the result of ‘self-love’.¹³ Although, according to Hume, it is understandable why Hobbes

¹⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 15.

¹¹ Hobbes, Ch. 15.

¹² Hobbes, Ch. 15.

¹³ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Section 2, Part 2.

would come to the conclusion that our regard for others could be boiled down to a concern for our own happiness, Hume considers this explanation to be too simplistic. While self-love is certainly a motivating feature of human psychology, some features of morality, such as gratitude, are worth pursuing not because of the happiness it brings ourselves but because they “promote the interests of our species and bestow happiness on human society.”¹⁴

Gratitude, then, according to Hume, is a social virtue. It is a virtue because it is a quality that is universally admired and reveals morally good internalized principles and dispositions.¹⁵ It is a social virtue because the disposition to show gratitude promotes the goodwill of mankind.¹⁶ For Hume, social virtues are those habits or principles that promote order in society. Gratitude produces social utility because it stems “from having sympathy with others and a generous concern for our kind and species.”¹⁷ We ought to promote such social virtues because it leads to community. No one can exist on his own. Human beings require the support of their community and so we ought to promote the social virtues, such as gratitude, that contribute to the smooth working of society. In the same vein, ingratitude is, according to Hume, “the most horrid and unnatural of all the crimes human creatures can commit.”¹⁸ Ingratitude is a social vice because it leads to the corrosion of the social ties that communities depend on.

¹⁴ Hume, Section 2, Part 2.

¹⁵ Hume, 32.

¹⁶ Hume, Section 2, Parts 1 and 2.

¹⁷ Hume, Section 2, Part 1.

¹⁸ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, bks. III, Part 1, Section 1.

Kant

Gratitude, for Kant, is a duty. If I were to provide a benefit to you that succeeded in benefiting you, you would incur a duty of gratitude to me. Your duty of gratitude holds until you are able to discharge it. Upon discharging your duty of gratitude, I do not then incur a duty of gratitude back to you. We are able to avoid such an infinite loop of gratitude because, according to Kant, the duty of gratitude is only generated in response to a supererogatory action. The initial kindness I did for you was optional while the kindness you did for me was morally required.

The problem with duties of gratitude, as Kant sees it, is that it creates an unequal moral relationship between the benefactor and beneficiary.¹⁹ Because of the extra duty of gratitude the beneficiary owes to the benefactor, her moral freedom is more constrained now than it was before she incurred the debt of gratitude. The benefactor now has a certain sense of power over the beneficiary.²⁰ If you owe a debt of gratitude to me, I can call on you to discharge the duty at any point. I might even dictate *how* you discharge your duty. Or, if I am feeling generous, I may cancel your debt of gratitude altogether.

This asymmetrical power relation is morally objectionable for Kant because willingly entering into such an asymmetrical moral relationship tends to diminish our own self-respect. By accepting optional benefits from others, we have willingly put ourselves in a morally inferior position. This, according to Kant, is a reason to avoid accepting optional benefits from others.²¹ When we do accept optional benefits from others, however, we should take care not to allow our wounded self-respect to lead us to feel resentment toward our benefactor or acting as if their

¹⁹ Kant, Lectures on Ethics, 27:697.

²⁰ Kant, 27:697.

²¹ Kant, 27:442.

optional kindness is a burden to us. Although the optional kindness might put you in a morally inferior position, you should still take care to appreciate the benefactor's generosity.

How Do You Express Gratitude?

Understanding the nature of gratitude is helpful insofar as it provides a framework for thinking about gratitude. This does not, however, give us sufficient insight into what it means to *express* gratitude. In this section we will examine each philosopher's answer to the question: "How do you express gratitude?"

Plato

Socrates, as we will remember, felt that he had a duty to remain in Athens and face his consequences rather than accept Crito's help and flee the city. He felt that fleeing would signal a lack of gratitude for all the things the city has done to nurture and protect him. For Socrates, it seems clear that gratitude requires some form of reciprocation. It would not have been enough to have feelings of gratitude toward Athens as he watches it fade into the distance behind him as he flees. Athens had to sacrifice some things to provide Socrates with the education and protection he had enjoyed his entire life; now, when Athens needs a sacrifice from him in return, he must provide it. Showing gratitude, then, according to Plato, requires providing an equivalent, not necessarily identical, benefit in return. There would be no way for Socrates to provide Athens with exactly the same benefits Athens had provided to him. He can, however, provide Athens with an equivalent benefit—he can stay and accept the consequences for breaking his end of the deal, by violating the laws of Athens, *even though* he does not believe that what he did was wrong.

Aristotle

As we will remember, Aristotle's understanding of gratitude depends on the nature of the relationship between the benefactor and the beneficiary. In friendships of utility, the nature of gratitude is that of a duty. In friendships of virtue, the nature of gratitude is that of a virtue. Because the nature of gratitude is different, the way in which we show our gratitude will also be different. In friendships of utility, since our friendship depends on being mutually beneficial, the way to show gratitude would be to directly reciprocate the benefit received with an equivalent benefit. This benefit need not be identical. If I give you a pot of honey from my hive, you do not need to give me a pot of honey in return. Rather, you might give me a jar of jam from your berry patch. The gift of jam is roughly equivalent to the gift of honey and so by reciprocating in this way, the friends have returned to their equilibrium. Returning to equilibrium means that neither friend is getting more out of the friendship than the other.

In friendships of virtue, on the other hand, since our friendship is characterized by a willingness to provide benefits to each other for the sake of the friendship, we are not concerned with keeping tabs on who has done more to benefit the friendship. We are instead concerned with wanting to benefit our friends because that is how friendships of virtue grow and develop. In friendships of virtue, not just any benefit will do. The benefits given are tailored specifically for the friend at hand. For instance, if I found a whole snake skin on the ground, I might give it to my friend who finds snakes fascinating. He would find joy in such a small token of friendship—it shows that I recognize one of his interests and want to support that interest. But just because I would give a snake skin to one friend does not mean I should give snake skins to all of my friends. Some friends might be scared of snakes or might find the skin disgusting. Giving a snake skin to a friend who finds snakes disgusting will do nothing to further my relationship with them

and may even harm the relationship. It could harm the friendship if I give the snake skin to someone whose father died of a snake bite, for instance. It could even harm the friendship with the friend who loves snakes if I give the skin to him at the wrong time. If I give the snake skin to him in the middle of his aunt's funeral, that is not the appropriate time to try to further a friendship with him. In friendships of virtue, then, it is not only the content of the gift that matters, it is the manner in which it is given. If giving the gift does not communicate a desire to continue and develop a friendship, something has gone wrong in expressing your gratitude.

Aquinas

Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that the answer to the question "How do I show gratitude?" depends on the nature of your relationship with your benefactor. Aquinas, however, makes further distinctions between the kinds of relationships you might have with your benefactor. Gratitude, according to Aquinas, is characterized by the repayment of favors and the repayment of favors may belong to one of three virtues: justice, gratitude, and friendship.²²

Repayment of a legal debt would be an example of the repayment of favors featuring the virtue of justice. In these cases, repayment should be made according to what you have received. If you hire a contractor to work on your house, you ought to pay them for the work she put in and the resources that were used. That is the just way to repay the services rendered to you. When repaying a debt in friendship, on the other hand, you ought to consider the cause of the friendship. If the friendship is based on the useful, like Aristotle's friendship of utility,

²² Aquinas, T., *Summa Theologiae*, II.II.q.106.

repayment should be made according to the usefulness accruing from the favor conferred. The more useful the benefit was to you, the more grateful you ought to be.

But if your repayment is characterized by gratitude, repayment depends on the disposition of the giver rather than on the effect. Suppose your benefactor only granted you a favor because it would ultimately benefit him by bestowing that favor on you. In that case, you should be grateful to him because he still provided you with a benefit he did not *need* to provide you. This does not mean, however, you ought to be as grateful to him as you would be if he had not done it for self-interested reasons. You may gauge your gratitude based on the giver's

When it comes to repaying a favor, *when* you discharge your debt is important. For instance, if you have a legal debt, it should be repaid right away because that involves keeping another's property without his consent.²³ If, on the other hand, your debt is a moral debt of gratitude, you should wait until it would be convenient for the benefactor—not convenient for you. Socrates, then, although he did not know it, was illustrating this rule of gratitude. It would have been better for Socrates to repay his debt to Athens—that is, to die for the city—when he is on his death bed. He is going to die anyway; he might as well drink the hemlock before death reaches him on his own. That would have been best for him—he could live out the rest of his life and then repay his debt at the very end. But there is a reason Socrates does not do that. At least partly this is because by repaying his debt when the city commands it, he is showing that he can put aside his own preferences for the sake of the city that has provided so much for him. That, it would seem, is true gratitude.

²³ Aquinas, T., II.II.4.

Kant

Finally, Kant again departs from his predecessors when it comes to answering the question “How do you show gratitude”. His response would be to avoid being in a position in which you would need to show gratitude in the first place. This, perhaps, seems jarring at first. We tend to think that gratitude is a good thing so it might seem odd to think that it is something that should be avoided. But Kant believes that by accepting benefits from others, we are limiting our own moral freedom. He thinks this because he believes that these debts of gratitude we are under can never be fully repaid.²⁴ Even if you paid him 50 times what he gave you, you would not be acting from a desire to do good, but rather, a desire to repay the debt.²⁵ Even though Kant thinks we cannot fully repay a debt of gratitude, we can and should still treat our benefactor with respect and kindness while attempting to repay the debt in kind.

How to Be a Good Benefactor.

Gratitude, especially for Kant, requires a lot of a beneficiary. It can be emotionally draining to be on the receiving end of a gift, but it can also be mentally and physically draining to come up with and deliver gifts for your benefactor. It is for these reasons that it is important to consider what makes a good benefactor? Sometimes one will have to be careful about who to accept benefits from. Being able to identify good benefactors will help identify those who are deserving of our gratitude.

²⁴ Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 27:442.

²⁵ Kant, 27:442.

Plato

In the *Crito*, Socrates believes that Athens has been a good benefactor to him. That is, Athens has always treated him well and been fair to him. It was clear from the beginning what Athens would offer Socrates and what Socrates was expected to do for Athens in return. Athens would provide nurturing, education, protection, and “a share of all the good things we could”.²⁶ If Socrates chooses to accept these benefits, he would be expected to abide by the laws of Athens. Athens had treated him fairly, had made clear the terms of the benefits she was bestowing on him, and had carried through on her promises to him. This, according to Plato, is the sign of a good benefactor. A good benefactor is one who has the best interest of the beneficiary in mind, makes clear the terms of the gift, and who succeeds in providing the benefits she has promised.

Aristotle

A good benefactor, according to Aristotle, is one who loves their beneficiaries more than the beneficiaries love them.²⁷ The good benefactor “will love and like their beneficiaries, even if they are of no use to them now and will not be in the future.”²⁸ This means that the good benefactor will have the best interest of their beneficiaries at heart, rather than trying to gain influence over them by giving them a gift only in order to get something in return. For instance, the good benefactor would not expect payment from someone who was unable to pay. (Citation?) The good benefactor would not hold the beneficiary’s debt over him in order to gain

²⁶ Plato, *Five Dialogues*, *Crito*, 51d.

²⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX.7.

²⁸ Aristotle, IX.7.1167b.

influence or manipulate the beneficiary into paying some other way. But it is out of respect for the benefactor that we ought to repay him if we have the means to do so. We should, however, be careful who we accept benefits from, and we should take note of the terms of the benefit so we can consent to the terms or reject it. If the terms are unfair, no potential beneficiary is obligated to accept a benefit. One must be careful not to accept benefits from someone who will hold the debt over him or use it as leverage to gain power. We should be particularly careful, Aristotle warns, about accepting benefits from evil people or tyrants because “taking implies receiving good and not doing what is shameful.”²⁹ If we accept benefits from tyrants, we are not receiving good and we are promoting vicious or shameful actions. A good benefactor, therefore, is one who has the interests of the beneficiary in mind and is aiming to promote good.

Seneca

As we will remember, Seneca is much more interested in laying out what it means to be a good benefactor than he is in spelling out all the ways one should go about showing gratitude to a benefactor. Seneca is worried that since benefactors are in a position to foist benefits on their beneficiaries, benefactors should act in ways that show as much consideration as possible for their beneficiaries. For example, if the benefactor is to give a gift, he should give it in a way that will be of as much use as possible for the beneficiary even if that means deceiving your friend or providing the benefit anonymously. To illustrate, Seneca tells the story of Arcesilaus who had a friend who was poor but concealed his poverty and need even though he did not have the money

²⁹ Aristotle, IV.1.

for the necessary expenses of existence.³⁰ So Arcesilaus placed a bag of money under his friend's pillow in order that his friend would be able to find what he wanted and needed rather than see it as receiving charity. Although Arcesilaus would have been doing a good thing by directly giving his friend a bag of money, finding the money under his pillow saved the friend from feeling the shame of receiving charity—something he clearly did not want.

Unlike Plato and Aristotle who thought that beneficiaries have a duty to reciprocate benefits, Seneca is suggesting not only is it morally permissible for beneficiaries *not* to reciprocate, it might actually be better if the benefactor gives the gift in such a way that the beneficiary is *unable* to reciprocate. The poor friend of Arcesilaus is unable to express his gratitude to Arcesilaus because he does not even know from where the bag of money came.

Providing benefits anonymously may seem odd to many people. There is a certain joy that comes from having someone be grateful to you. For Seneca, however, the pride of the giver is not what is most important in giving a gift. Taking care of the beneficiary is the most important part of giving a gift. If the recipient is really in need, you should want to help him even if it means you will not get the credit. Seneca adds: "You should be satisfied with the approval of your own conscience; if not, you do not really delight in doing good, but in being seen do good."³¹ The good benefactor, then, should want to do good for the sake of doing good and for the sake of the beneficiary. It is from this rule that he comes to the conclusion that if you are the beneficiary, you should forget that you have given as soon as possible and therefore not *expect* anything in return.

³⁰ Seneca, *On Benefits*, II.10.

³¹ Seneca, II.10.

Aquinas

Aquinas is also concerned with the question of “What makes a good benefactor”. One question he reflects on is whether or not you should withdraw your favors from those who are ungrateful. Imagine you have done a favor for someone and in return they do nothing. The recipient does not acknowledge the gift or acknowledge you: he just accepts the gift and moves on as if nothing has happened. Ultimately Aquinas argues that in such a case you should *not* withdraw your favors.³² For one, you shouldn’t judge someone to be ungrateful if they do not repay their debt. He might not repay his debt because he does not have the means or the opportunity for repaying—not because he is ungrateful. The grateful person should want to be grateful. If the beneficiary does not express his gratitude to you after you are kind to him once, it may take more than once. If, after several attempts at being kind of him, he stubbornly refuses to be grateful, you should cease from bestowing favors upon him. Of course, your resources are limited, and you want to bestow benefits on those who will appreciate them, but you should only withdraw your favors after you have given him plenty of chances to show his gratitude. A good benefactor, then, will have the interests of his beneficiary at heart. Having the interests of the beneficiary at heart will sometimes mean giving them the benefit of the doubt and not jumping to conclusions about whether or not the beneficiary is grateful. Your job as the benefactor is to help others. If it turns out that your multiple attempts help are not appreciated, only then can you withdraw your benefits.

³² Aquinas, T., *Summa Theologiae*, II.II.q.106.

Hobbes

Hobbes would agree with Aquinas that a good benefactor would want to bestow benefits on those who will appreciate them and withdraw favors from those who fail to reciprocate those favors. This is because on Hobbes' view, "no man gives except with the intention of bringing good to *himself*."³³ If a beneficiary fails to fulfill their duty of gratitude, the benefactor has no reason to continue to bestow benefits on her. The benefactor will now regret having bestowed benefits on her.

Aquinas' view, it is important to note, is more lenient than Hobbes'. For Aquinas, as we will remember, a benefactor should give the beneficiary plenty of chances to reciprocate a benefit. A failure to show gratitude in a single instance is not indicative of a complete lack of gratitude. If the beneficiary begins to show a pattern of failing to show gratitude, then withdrawing benefits is appropriate. For Aquinas, ingratitude is more of a stable character trait than a one-off action. Hobbes, on the other hand, considers a beneficiary to be showing ingratitude if the giver could have reasonable cause to regret bestowing that benefit. This bar for ingratitude is much lower for Hobbes than it was for Aquinas. Any instance of failing to fulfill your duty of gratitude is an instance of ingratitude and thus would give the benefactor reason to withdraw his benefits.

³³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 15.

Kant

Since on Kant's view, accepting debts of gratitude leads to a diminishment of our own self-respect, we ought to be care about who we accept these optional benefits from.³⁴ If, for instance, a potential benefactor is acting so as to put you in his debt, we should not accept benefits from him. When we are in an inferior position to someone like that, we leave ourselves open to being abused or taken advantage of. This would lead to further damage to our self-respect. If we must accept an optional kindness, we ought to take care that our benefactor will not abuse their power over us.

Conclusion

By studying the historical context, we can see why contemporary philosophers struggle to agree about the nature of gratitude. Most agree that gratitude involves both virtue and duty in some capacity. The disagreement stems from whether we should classify gratitude *primarily* as a duty or *primarily* as a virtue. Each position is able to capture important aspects of gratitude that the other struggles to account for. Before we can make any judgments about whether gratitude should be understood primarily as a virtue or as a duty, we must distinguish between gratitude and other closely related concepts such as thankfulness and appreciation. The next chapter will lay out how I will understand the terms 'gratitude' and 'thankfulness' in the rest of the dissertation.

³⁴ Kant, Lectures on Ethics, 27:442.

Chapter 3: Gratitude, Thankfulness, and Appreciation

We generally take gratitude, appreciation, thankfulness, and gladness to have more or less the same meaning. Sometimes we might use “gratitude” instead of “gladness” because being grateful seems to have more power than merely being glad. “I am so grateful you are safe!” somehow sounds more sincere than “I am so glad you are safe!” Nevertheless, we tend to use these four words in many of the same sorts of circumstances—when we want to take notice of, or highlight, something that we like or that benefits us in some way. All four words seem to pick out something that is good. Consider the following examples:

“I am grateful it did not rain on our picnic.”
“I am grateful to you all for being here today.”
“I am thankful for my family.”
“I am grateful the teacher did not include fractions on the test.”
“I appreciate your honesty.”
“I am glad the court ruled in my favor.”
“I am sure the grass appreciates all this rain.”
“I am grateful for the warm weather.”

We get the gist of what the speaker is trying to get across in each of these sentences. The choice of words, at least on the level of communication, makes very little difference as to the meaning of the sentence. Take “I am grateful it did not rain on our picnic”, as an example.

“Gratitude” could easily be replaced with any of the other three options:

I am grateful it did not rain on our picnic
I am thankful it did not rain on our picnic.
I am glad it did not rain on our picnic.
I appreciate that it did not rain on our picnic.

Substituting one word for another in this example makes very little difference because each one gets across the idea that (1) it could have rained on our picnic (2) it did not rain on our

picnic (3) I noticed that despite the possibility of rain, it did not rain on our picnic (4) not raining on our picnic is a good thing.

It is certainly not *always* true that these four words can be substituted in for each other with little effect on the meaning. But it is true that we can, and do, make these kinds of substitutions on a regular basis. In observing the way lay people use the words “gratitude” and “thankfulness” specifically, they are almost always used interchangeably. In this chapter I will lay out the difference between how I will use the terms “gratitude”, “thankfulness”, and “appreciation”. I understand gratitude as having a three-place structure—I am thankful to you for something—while thankfulness has a two-place structure—I am thankful for some state of affairs. If gratitude is always directed *to* someone *for* something, there is some question about who (or what) are suitable objects of our gratitude. Can I be grateful to an inanimate object, for instance? What about a horse or a dead person? While these are interesting questions, I leave the answers to these questions open because I am primarily interested in our expressions of gratitude to other (living) people.

Two Structures of Gratitude

There’s no doubt that appreciation, gratitude, and thankfulness are closely related. Since the majority of this dissertation will be concerned with gratitude, let us start there. Beginning with Walker in 1980, the way we use words such as gratitude, appreciation, and thankfulness has received some philosophical attention.¹ In thinking about gratitude, philosophers started to

¹ Walker, “Gratefulness and Gratitude.”

realize that there are two main ways that people use the word gratitude. On the one hand, “gratitude” is often followed by the word “that”, as in “I am grateful *that* it did not rain on our picnic”. McAleer has labeled this kind of gratitude *propositional gratitude*.² Propositional gratitude is used to pick out gratitude for a particular state of affairs. On the other hand, we have *prepositional gratitude*. This kind of gratitude is when the word “gratitude” is followed by the prepositions “to” and “for”, as in “I am grateful *to* you *for* saving my life.” Prepositional gratitude, then, is the sort of thing that is directed toward a benefactor as opposed to being directed towards a state of affairs.

Prepositional Gratitude

Between these two structures of gratitude, philosophers have generally come to agree that prepositional gratitude better captures our intuitions about the concept of gratitude.³ This is because propositional gratitude more closely captures concepts such as appreciation or gladness.⁴ In the next section I will introduce the idea that prepositional gratitude more closely captures “thankfulness” though both “thankfulness” and “gratitude” are closely linked by appreciation.

If gratitude is to take the prepositional form—Y is grateful *to* R *for* Φ –ing—then some serious questions about the nature of gratitude arise. Is it considered gratitude so long as it fits this form? Surely the answer cannot be that simple because we could easily edit almost any sentence taking the form of propositional gratitude to transform it to prepositional gratitude. For

² McAleer, “Propositional Gratitude.”

³ See Manela, “Gratitude”; Gulliford, Morgan, and Kristjánsson, “Recent Work on the Concept of Gratitude in Philosophy and Psychology”; Carr, “Varieties of Gratitude.”

⁴ Manela, “Gratitude.”

instance, I could say “I am grateful *that* it did not rain on our picnic” (propositional gratitude) but I could just as easily say “I am grateful *to* the clouds (or God) *for* not raining on our picnic” (prepositional gratitude). It would be silly to think that whether or not I am grateful depends solely on how I *phrased* my expression of gratitude. There must, then, be some relevant difference between appropriate objects of our gratitude.

Let us start with this paradigm case of gratitude: I am grateful to you for saving me from drowning. In this case, I am grateful to you, an adult human being, for something you did intentionally to help me. This is also the case of other paradigm examples of gratitude: I am grateful to you for stopping to help me when my car broke down on the side of the road. In this case, like the last, I am grateful to you, an adult human being, for intentionally stopping to help me. An adult human being is a clear-cut case of a possible benefactor, R, that is the kind of being capable of Φ -ing intentionally. Yet questions arise when it is unclear whether R can be the appropriate object of our gratitude. In the following sections I will look at three possible benefactors to whom we might be grateful: first I will consider whether we can be grateful to inanimate objects such as mountains; then I will consider whether we can be grateful to animals; and finally, I will consider whether we can be grateful to people who have died.

Gratitude to Inanimate Objects

Consider the following case presented by McAleer:

Consider a scene from a classic American film, John Huston’s *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, in which the old prospector, Howard, tells his partners that before they leave, they must restore the mountain to its natural state: “We’ve

wounded this mountain [and] it's our duty to close her wounds; it's the least we can do to show our gratitude for all the wealth she's given us."⁵

In this example, Howard uses the three-place structure of gratitude to press his gratitude to the mountain. The mountain has provided a benefit to Howard and his partners and in response they have a duty to show their gratitude by "closing her wounds." At first glance it does not seem terribly odd. Just as I mentioned at the start of this chapter, it would not be unusual to say, "I am grateful to this tree for sheltering me from the blazing summer sun" or "I am grateful to the ocean for providing us with such a delicious bounty of seafood." But if we are being careful, are we grateful *to* inanimate objects or are we thankful *for* some state of affairs closely related to the inanimate object?

By saying the mountain was "wounded" or that Howard and his partners have to show gratitude to the mountain "for all the wealth she has *given*", this suggests that gratitude *does* require agency on the part of the benefactor. Howard says he is grateful for what the mountain has provided them as if the mountain had a choice and she chose to "give" those resources to him and his partners. The mountain, of course, is being personified. Mountains cannot intentionally give anything. It seems likely the Howard's gratitude is merely metaphorical; it is 'as if' he has gratitude toward the mountain. Howard might be thankful *that* the mountain had resources he could use and benefit from, but he is not grateful *to* the mountain for providing those resources. Although he might not be *grateful*, a debt of gratitude is not the only way to motivate Howard's feelings of obligation to repair the mountain's wounds. He may still want to repair the mountain

⁵ McAleer, "Propositional Gratitude."

because he finds the mountain itself or the habitats found on the mountain to be intrinsically valuable.

Philosophers generally agree with this diagnosis. They agree that when we say “Y is grateful to R for ϕ -ing”, what we mean is that R is grateful to B for ϕ -ing *intentionally*.⁶ The tree did not provide you shade intentionally—the tree was likely going to provide shade whether you needed it or not or whether you were there to appreciate it. In the same way, the mountain did not provide those resources to Howard and his partners intentionally—those resources would have been available on the mountain whether Howard claimed them or not and it had no choice about whether to give up those resources. In both of these cases, it is possible to be grateful on the propositional structure of gratitude—that is, you might be thankful for a certain state of affairs, namely that there was a tree providing shade or that the mountain was full of valuable resources, but not grateful in the *prepositional* use.

Gratitude to Animals

We cannot be grateful to inanimate objects because they lack the intentionality required by gratitude. But can we be grateful to animals? Kant seemed to think we could be grateful to animals. Consider the following passage: “gratitude for the services of an old horse or house-dog is *indirectly*, a duty, namely, an indirect duty in regard of these animals; for, *directly*, it is no more than what a man owes to himself.” Here Kant suggests that we *should* show gratitude towards animals. Like the mountain case above, Kant’s gratitude to the animal may be metaphorical; it is ‘as if’ he has gratitude to the animal. We might think that we should show

⁶ Manela, “Gratitude.”

gratitude to animals because failing to do so would reveal a weakened commitment to respecting humanity. A person who fails to show gratitude to an animal is less likely to show gratitude to other people.

This metaphorical gratitude that Kant has in mind sounds more like appreciation or thankfulness than it does gratitude. Kant is not grateful to the horse for some, particular actions. He *appreciates* the horse's helpful service or he is thankful *that* the horse has survived long enough to provide him with good service. But Kant may be mistaken to say that he is grateful to the horse for good service. While it is good to not take the horse for granted, the goodness of not taking the horse for granted does not automatically equate to gratitude.

In Kant's case there is some question about whether or not the horse is the proper object of gratitude because no particular instance of the horse providing a good service was picked out. Consider instead a case in which we might be grateful to an animal for performing a particular action: A dog sees a person thrashing and drowning in a lake. The dog jumps in and drags the person to shore thus saving her from drowning. In this case, unlike the mountain case above, there is some reason to think that the dog might have acted intentionally. The dog saw that there was a problem and at least appeared to make the decision to jump in and save the person. There is a sense in which the dog could have done otherwise: the dog could have continued sniffing interesting smells on the shore or it could have chased some birds instead. The mountain, on the other hand, did not even have the appearance of a choice in whether to give up her natural resources. When we compare these two cases, we have much more reason to think gratitude might be appropriate in the case of the dog.

Yet some might question whether a dog has the capacity to act intentionally in the way required for gratitude. Gratitude, some might claim, is a response to beneficence. Beneficence

requires an understanding of what you are doing and an aim to do that thing in an effort to help someone. The mountain has no understanding of gold or of what gold means for humans. Nor did it give away its resources intentionally with the goal of helping the prospectors. While it is clear that the dog is more capable of acting intentionally than the mountain is, it is still not totally obvious that dogs understand the consequences of drowning or that the dog acted intentionally with the goal of saving the person's life. On the other hand, it is not obvious that dogs do not understand the consequences of drowning or that the dog acted purely from instinct. This may be a problem for someone to take up in the future but for now it is enough to note that we are making some progress towards understanding who (or what) might be the appropriate object of our gratitude.

Gratitude to the Dead

Regardless of whether or not you agree that animals can be the proper object of our gratitude, we can agree that if we should show gratitude to anyone, it would be to other people. That claim, at least, is obvious when we are talking about other humans that are living, breathing, and performing actions intentionally. But can we be grateful to those who are no longer alive? Consider following claim: I am grateful to Abraham Lincoln for abolishing slavery. This claim takes the 3-place form of prepositional gratitude. Abraham Lincoln, or at least the person who once was Abraham Lincoln, is the object of our gratitude. He intentionally benefitted those who were slaves as well as their descendants by signing the Emancipation Proclamation and therefore ensuring their freedom. Gratitude in the form of carrying on his plans, celebrating his accomplishments, or visiting his memorial, we might think, is the proper response even though Lincoln has long been dead.

Again, it is not obvious that gratitude is the proper response in this case. Some might think that gratitude is due when a benefactor intentionally provides a benefit *to you*. Gratitude, the thought goes, is not owed to someone who provides a generic benefit that *happens* to benefit you. This is because gratitude would have an asymmetrical structure: I am grateful *to you* for this benefit, but you did not provide the benefit *to me*. For example, suppose I am down on my luck and visit a Little Free Pantry to pick up some food to feed my family. Someone had to stock that pantry—they stocked the pantry intentionally in order to help someone like me who needed that food. They did not, however, have me *specifically* in mind when they chose what to put in the pantry. The pantry stocker bought things that would benefit *anyone* who came to the pantry. While I do appreciate *that* someone stocked the pantry and I may be thankful that the pantry was stocked, gratitude is not appropriate because the benefit was not directed to me. In the case of Lincoln, he did not have every individual slave in mind nor could he have had every future descendant of slaves in mind when he signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Because his actions were not directed toward any particular individual, gratitude is not the appropriate response though we may be thankful *that* he signed it.

On the other hand, it is not obvious that the above view is right either. Some might think that it does not matter whether the benefactor intended to benefit *you* so long as he succeeded in benefiting you and he had intended to provide a benefit. It would be appropriate, on this view, to show gratitude to the Free Little Pantry stocker because they succeeded in benefiting you—you needed the food they provided—and by stocking the pantry, they had intended to help someone who needed the food. A response such as “Wow, thanks for organizing this food pantry! It really helped me!” seems appropriate. In the same way, descendants of slaves might be grateful to Lincoln because he both intended to and succeeded in benefiting them by ensuring that they

would not be born into slavery. Although he did not have any particular slave or any particular descendant of slaves in mind, gratitude might still be appropriate.

In the same vein, we might have reason to think that it is possible to show ingratitude to those who have died. Urinating on Lincoln's tomb, for example, might be considered an overt sign of ingratitude if Lincoln did something that succeeded in benefitting you and if you, in return, urinated on his grave. Should an action would certainly not be an appropriate way of expressing your appreciation for what he had done—in fact, it might even be a way of showing your resentment or hatred of him by actively dismissing or minimizing the benefit he provided to you. Whether you would consider that ingratitude or not, we might, at the very least, think that urinating on Lincoln's tomb is an egregious display of disrespect.

Both the animal case and the Lincoln case are examples of non-paradigm cases of gratitude. There are reasons both for understanding gratitude as appropriate in these cases and for being inappropriate. In the Lincoln case, it is unclear whether gratitude is appropriate because in that case, the dead person's action was not directed towards any particular individual. In a final attempt to clarify the question of whether it is appropriate to owe gratitude to a person who is dead, consider the following case: Grandma has recently died. In her will, she left each of her grandchildren some money to help pay for their educations. Unlike the Lincoln case, Grandma did have particular individuals in mind who she wanted to benefit. After being successfully benefitted, it remains unclear whether the grandchild owe gratitude to their deceased grandma.

On the one hand, we might think gratitude is appropriate. Grandma intended to benefit them and succeeded in providing that benefit. In this case, it might be right for the grandchildren to be grateful to their grandma for leaving them some money. She did not have to leave them anything; she could have given it all to her church. But even more importantly, she had each of

her grandchildren specifically in mind when she made her will. Since the grandchildren only receive their inheritance for their education once grandma has died, this seems to be a case where it *is* possible to be grateful to someone who has died.

Propositional Gratitude and Thankfulness

So far, I have been making the traditional distinction between prepositional gratitude (the main focus of the gratitude literature) and propositional gratitude. This, however, is not a terribly helpful distinction. For one, it gets confusing when the gratitude literature only talks about prepositional gratitude and yet we still call propositional gratitude “gratitude.” This feeds into the confusion that I started the chapter with. But also, the labels themselves are too easily confused. In this section I want suggest how we can move beyond the propositional/prepositional gratitude distinction. Since philosophers have generally agreed that prepositional gratitude is our main focus when talking about gratitude, I will just call that “gratitude”. Gratitude, then, is best understood as a proper response *to* a benefactor *for* doing or having done something beneficial for the beneficiary.

Since that is how I am understanding what gratitude is, we need a new label for propositional gratitude. Manela suggests appreciation or gladness.⁷ But, for reasons I will explain below, this does not help explain away the confusions I mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Instead, I will suggest that propositional gratitude is better referred to as “thankfulness.” Our linguistic intuitions regarding what I call “gratitude” and “thankfulness” are quite muddled, but the underlying philosophical issues are real. David Steindl-Rast, for example, makes similar

⁷ Manela, “Gratitude.”

distinctions between gratitude and thankfulness but what he calls gratitude, I would label thankfulness, and vice versa. What I am doing in the rest of the chapter is to, at the very least, stipulate how I will use these terms in the rest of the dissertation as to make the particular issues I want to focus on more vivid.

Propositional gratitude, now called thankfulness, as we will remember, takes the form: A is grateful that X, where X is any good state of affairs. Thankfulness, in other words, is an expression of *appreciation* for something or some state of affairs. In the next section I will return to the concept of appreciation and the role it plays in both thankfulness and gratitude. For now, however, it is enough to note that by “appreciation” I mean a recognition and positive valuation of something or some state of affairs. “I am thankful for my family”, then, means that I recognize and value my family in virtue of them being my family, not for anything in particular they have done for me.

Interestingly, the Oxford Dictionary defines “thankfulness” as being pleased and relieved, as in “I was very thankful to be alive” or “They were thankful that the war was finally over.”⁸ The word “thankfulness” comes from the Old English word “thancas”, the plural of thanc, which means ‘(kindly) thoughts or gratitudes’. It is also related to the Dutch dank and German Dank which also mean to thank.⁹ The etymology of “thankfulness” suggests that historically it has meant something like I am pleased, I have kindly thoughts, about something. This idea of “relief”, I think, is an important aspect of thankfulness and is one that is often overlooked when gratitude and thankfulness are lumped together. Consider a case where you rescue me from a

⁸ “Thankfulness.”

⁹ “Thankfulness.”

burning building: I am grateful to you for saving me. Running into the burning building was something you did as a kindness to a stranger. While I am certainly grateful to you, I am also thankful. I am thankful, I am relieved, that I was rescued. These two things happen simultaneously so it is understandable that they would be lumped together and confused. The relief I am feeling after being pulled from the building has more to do with the fact *that* I was rescued or *that* you happened to be there when I needed your help.

One possible objection to this view is that thankfulness understood in this way does not align with our intuitions. That is, one would think that thanking and thankfulness would go hand-in-hand and yet thankfulness, on this view, seems more like a solitary personal experience but the act of thanking seems interpersonal. For example, “I am thankful for this beautiful weather” seems like a positive valuation of a state of affairs—I noticed the weather is particularly nice today and I like it! But I am not necessarily *thanking* anyone for the beautiful weather.¹⁰ Whereas if I thank you for letting me borrow your car when I got a flat tire, it is more than a mere positive valuation of a state of affairs I am thanking *you*.

¹⁰ Except, perhaps, God. It could be argued that everything that would be classified under “thankfulness” on my view, is really just implicit gratitude *to* God *for* creating such a state of affairs. This is a question for a different paper, but a rough sketch of my response would be: Since gratitude (but not thankfulness) generates certain obligations to reciprocate, it would be dangerous to go down the path of saying all forms of thankfulness are really forms of gratitude to God. It would be dangerous because we would suddenly have an infinite number of duties of gratitude. I would have a duty to show for the grass, rain, sunshine, spiders, bats, sharks, and everything else in the universe. There might be *some* things for which you are grateful to God. But most of the time I think those sentiments are best captured by “I am thankful that God created a world where...” because what you are thankful for is a state of affairs, a world where certain things are true.

David Steindl-Rast has put forward this sort of objection.¹¹ He fundamentally disagrees with all of the distinctions I have made so far. What I have labeled “gratitude”, he calls thankfulness and what I have called “thankfulness” he calls gratitude. The reason for this is that he thinks “thanking” and “thankfulness” should go together. He argues that since we think of *thanking* in terms of giver, gift, and receiver (*I thank you for letting me borrow your car, giving me such a nice Christmas present, for taking in my trash cans while I was away, etc.*), the three-part relation (which I have been calling gratitude) would better be labeled *thankfulness*.¹² “Gratitude”, Steindl-Rast claims, belongs to the inner-realm.¹³ That is, gratitude is a state of being, as opposed to thanking, which is an action. Gratitude, on his view, since it is a state of being, does not distinguish between giver, gift, and receiver.

I can understand the appeal of such a view. Intuitively, it makes sense to want to group thanking and thankfulness together. They share the same root word and so it seems obvious that “thankfulness” would describe the act of “thanking”. As appealing as that sounds, there are several reasons why I do not think Steindl-Rast’s distinctions will help solve the confusions we started the paper with. 1) He is confusing appreciation with what he calls gratitude. This, I think, is moving too quickly. *Appreciation* is a state. But the distinction between thankfulness and gratitude depends on the *object*. You are grateful *to* a person, you are thankful *for* a state of affairs. *Thanking* can fall under either category such as when we say, “Thank heavens you are alright!” or “Thank you for doing that for me.”

¹¹ Steindl-Rast, “Gratitude as Thankfulness and as Gratefulness.”

¹² Steindl-Rast, p.286.

¹³ Steindl-Rast, p.286.

But again, this highlights the confusions surrounding gratitude and thankfulness. This is because one can be both grateful and thankful at the same time. I am grateful *to* the firefighter for rescuing my cat from a burning building and I am thankful *that* my cat is alive. Gratitude requires a reciprocated response—and sometimes that takes the form of thanking. I thank the firefighter for saving my cat. Otherwise, it is rude. I thank my aunt for the Christmas present. Otherwise it is rude. But thanking, in both cases, is a response to your appreciation for a certain state of affairs—receiving a Christmas present and the life of my cat.

What Lurks Behind Both Thankfulness and Gratitude

The confusion between “gratitude” and “thankfulness” is understandable. They are very similar concepts and can be used in very similar situations. One reason for the confusion surrounding these two terms is the underlying concept that binds “gratitude” and “thankfulness” together—appreciation. Again, it might be helpful to look at how the dictionary’s definition of appreciation as well as its etymology to understand how the word has traditionally been used. The OED defines appreciation as “the recognition and enjoyment of the good qualities of someone or something.”¹⁴ It is derived from the Latin verb *appretiare* which means “to set at a price or appraise.”¹⁵ This is interesting because when we appreciate something, we recognize it as something worth valuing. When we say “*Bob will be remembered by friends for his appreciation of fine single-malt scotch*” we mean that Bob *valued* and *enjoyed* single-malt scotch.¹⁶ Appreciation, this valuing and enjoying, is an important aspect of both thankfulness and

¹⁴ “Appreciation.”

¹⁵ “Appreciation.”

¹⁶ “Appreciation.”

gratitude. Consider the examples of thankfulness from the Oxford dictionary: ‘they were thankful that the war was finally over’ and ‘I was very thankful to be alive’. In the first example, they appreciated—they valued and enjoyed—the peace that comes at the end of the war. In the second example, I appreciate—I value and enjoy—being alive. When it comes to gratitude, while I appreciate the benefit bestowed on me, I also appreciate the benefactor himself. To use the same example from above, when I am pulled from the burning building by a stranger, I appreciate the gift he has given me—my life—but I also appreciate *him*, the person who saved me. By expressing my gratitude *to him*, I am recognizing him as someone of *particular* value to me. He is no longer someone I value just for the sake of being human. Rather, I am assigning him extra value—I am recognizing that despite his being a stranger, I now value him beyond his mere humanness. I value him as an individual.

I recognize that there is more work to be done in spelling out the differences between gratitude, thankfulness, and appreciation. The distinctions I am making are far from obvious. Disagreements about the nature, or specifics, of these distinctions may persist but for now, this is how I will be using these words.

Conclusion

In any conversation about gratitude, it is tempting to use the word appreciation, gratitude, and thankfulness interchangeably. In most everyday contexts, this ambiguity does not pose a problem. We can easily understand what someone means regardless of the word they choose to use. As a result, it might be tempting to say “So what? You understand what I mean so what is the point of getting bogged down in semantics?” The answer is this: the rest of this project is focused exclusively on what I have called gratitude. My aim is to better understand the specifics

of gratitude—what is the structure of gratitude, what does gratitude require, when is gratitude required, to whom gratitude is required? Answering these questions requires that we are very specific about the sort of thing we are examining. If we jump back and forth between gratitude and thankfulness, our exploration becomes clouded and more confused. Gratitude, thankfulness, and appreciation, are, as far as this project is concerned, technical terms that refer to different concepts. Moving forward, it is important to keep these distinctions in mind and keep our attention on *gratitude*.

Chapter 4: The Dual Nature of Gratitude

Gratitude is something we are all familiar with—we know what it feels like to have gratitude, we can identify instances of others showing their gratitude, and we can identify when someone has failed to show gratitude to us. Yet ‘gratitude’ is used to cover a wide range of actions and attitudes. Sometimes our gratitude is deeply personal and heartfelt such as what a parent feels when someone saves her child from drowning. Other times our gratitude is less heartfelt and more obligatory such as when Grandma gives you your yearly lumpy, itchy, hand-knitted Christmas sweater and your response is automatic: you smile and say, "Thank you, Grandma!" regardless of how you really feel about the sweater. Since “gratitude” is used to describe a wide variety of actions and attitudes, it can be difficult to pin down what, exactly, gratitude is.

Some philosophers put more emphasis on the sorts of actions that constitute a grateful response.¹ Those views tend to characterize gratitude primarily as a duty, as something that is owed to a benefactor. Other philosophers put more emphasis on how the agent experiences her gratitude.² Those views tend to characterize gratitude primarily as a set of attitudes one should have toward the gift or the benefactor. Both views recognize the importance of the other and agree that gratitude involves both responding in the right way and having the right attitudes. The difference lies in what they take to be explanatorily primary—if duty is fundamental then what it

¹ See Berger, “Gratitude”; Card, “Gratitude and Obligation”; McAleer, “Propositional Gratitude”; Smilansky, “Should I Be Grateful to You for Not Harming Me?”; and Walker, “Gratefulness and Gratitude.”

² See Kristjansson, “An Aristotelian Virtue of Gratitude”; Weiss, “The Moral and Social Dimensions of Gratitude”; and Wellman, “Gratitude As A Virtue,” 1999.

means to *be grateful* can be explained in terms of duty; if having the right kinds of attitudes is basic, our duty to be grateful can be explained in terms of those virtues. Ultimately, however, I will argue that neither one of these views is able to fully account for our wide range of intuitions about gratitude. The virtue of gratitude, I suggest, is best understood, at least in part, in terms of principles. General principles such as “Acknowledge your benefactor,” “Do not harm your benefactor,” “Respect or benefactor” make up the content of the virtue of gratitude. They do not, however, provide detailed guidance about what one should do in any given case. The principle “Acknowledge your benefactor” does not detail *how* I should acknowledge you. Appealing to the ideal of gratitude provides us with a little more guidance. The ideally grateful will, for instance, avoid acknowledging her benefactor in a way that will cause him embarrassment. The principles and ideals of gratitude are not intended to be a perfect decision procedure. They will, however, tend to lead us towards grateful actions and away from ingratitude.

Two Views of Gratitude

Consider the case of Grudgingly Grateful Child, a child whose parents force her to write thank you notes for every Christmas and birthday present she receives. While the child loves to play with all of her new toys, she dreads seeing the box of thank you notes appear on the kitchen table. When the box appears, she suddenly has a bunch of excuses as to why today is not a good day for her to write her thank you notes—her wrist is tired from playing all those new video games, she has mysteriously come down with an illness that prevents her from writing, she needs a snack, and so on. Her parents, who strongly believe that writing thank you notes will teach their daughter to show gratitude, try to make the ordeal as painless as possible by helping their daughter draft a template thank you note that reads "Dear X, Thank you for the _____. I like

it very much. (and in the case of money: I plan to use it to buy ____.) Thank you again. Love, Grateful Child." After exhausting all of her excuses, Grateful Child grudgingly sits down at the table and writes her thank you notes using the template.

On the other hand, consider the case of the Heart Transplant Recipient, a middle-aged man who, due to a genetic heart abnormality, is in desperate need of a new heart. During his stay in the hospital, he had come to terms with the fact that unless he got a new heart soon, he may never see his children grow up, graduate from high school, or get married. One day, however, he got news that his doctors had found a heart for him. The heart had belonged to a recent college graduate who had died in a car accident. Heart Transplant Recipient is overwhelmed by conflicting emotions. On the one hand he is excited for his second chance at life and yet he is sad because his happiness comes at his donor's expense. These conflicting emotions have left Heart Transplant Recipient essentially paralyzed when it comes to outwardly expressing his gratitude.

Considered separately, I think many of us would consider either one of these cases to be an example involving gratitude. Many parents would agree with Grudgingly Grateful Child's parents that children need to be taught how to show gratitude to others *even when* they are not feeling particularly grateful. They want to see their child doing what gratitude requires. On the other hand, most of us would agree that Heart Transplant Recipient is grateful even though he has not done anything to *show* his gratitude. When placed side-by-side, however, it becomes less clear what, if anything, these two cases have in common such that they are both examples of gratitude. Disagreements over cases such as these have lead philosophers down two different roads. On the one hand, we have those who understand gratitude *primarily* as a duty to others. On these views having the right attitudes or cultivating certain character traits are secondary to an outward display of gratitude, which is what is most fundamental to gratitude. On the other

hand, we have those who understand gratitude *primarily* as a set of character traits or attitudes. Having these character traits is primary because they are what will direct the agent to show their gratitude outwardly. Let us now look at how these two views are able to explain how both of these cases involve gratitude.

Understanding Gratitude as Primarily a Duty to Others

Generally, when we think of obligations of gratitude, we think of the following kind of scenario: someone gives you a gift; you are now indebted to that person until you are able to discharge that debt. Claudia Card labels this the debtor paradigm.³ On this paradigm, the benefactor is in a position of power. He has done something nice for the beneficiary and now he is in a position to dictate the terms of how and when the beneficiary repays that debt.⁴ Banks, for instance, operate under this paradigm. When a borrower goes to the bank to borrow some money, the bank establishes the terms of the agreement. In return for the loan, the beneficiary enters in to a formal agreement with the bank that spells out amount of time the borrower has to pay back the loan as well as any interest the borrower will be responsible for paying.

This is a fairly common way of thinking about gratitude. When someone performs a kindness of us, or gives us a gift, we often feel obligated to reciprocate in some way. Sometimes we are excited to share our happiness with our benefactor by expressing our gratitude to them. When a wealthy benefactor pays for your chemo treatment, you may be excited, jump up and down, or hug the benefactor. But at the same time, this may feel like a burden. If you accept this

³ Card, “Gratitude and Obligation.”

⁴ We might think of Kant’s view of gratitude as an example of the debtor paradigm.

generous gift, you may feel indebted to your benefactor. The next time the benefactor asks for a favor, you may feel obligated to say yes when you otherwise would have said no. By accepting the gift, you are allowing the benefactor to have a certain amount of power over you and that is an uncomfortable position to be in especially when you have no clear way of discharging that debt.

This loss of power and the weight of being indebted to another person does not necessarily match our intuitions about gratitude. While we may feel an obligation to do something kind for our benefactor in return, intuitively, gratitude should feel lighter and not something we might wish to avoid. The feelings of resentment or anger that might arise run contrary to our intuitions of gratitude. Gratitude, we might think, should fill us with happiness rather than dread.

Card introduces the trustee paradigm as an alternative way to understand the obligation of gratitude without the heaviness of being in debt to your benefactor. Under the trustee paradigm, owing gratitude is more like having accepted a deposit than like having taken out a loan.⁵ A trustee, unlike a borrower, does not have to prove to the grantor that she is reliable and trustworthy. The grantor already sees the trustee as an equal— she sees him as someone who can be trusted to protect something of value. As a trustee, however, the deposit is not his property. He still has an obligation to return the deposit at some point in the future. That does not mean he is therefore a debtor. He is the keeper of the deposit until it is time for it to be returned.

Card, naturally, argues that the trustee paradigm better captures the nature of gratitude. When a friend invites you over for a dinner party, for example, it is a mistake to think that you

⁵ Card, “Gratitude and Obligation,” 121.

now indebted to him until you have invited him over to your house for dinner. This is because he has entrusted you with some goodwill. We might even think of his invitation as an invitation of friendship. You can decide whether to accept the invitation of friendship or reject it. If you accept, it is not that you are now indebted to your friend, rather it is that it is now your turn to extend the invitation of friendship back to him. In true friendship, friends tend to see each other as equals. We do nice things for our friends not to put them in debt to us but for the sake of extending goodwill to them. When we think of gratitude in this way, we can capture our desire for reciprocation while maintaining our moral freedom. This, Card argues, more naturally matches our intuitions about the nature of gratitude because it leads us away from feelings of resentment and dread and towards feelings of happiness and comradery.

How, then, would this view make sense of the Grudgingly Grateful Child and the Heart Transplant Recipient? These two cases, as we will remember, are designed to pull our intuitions in opposite directions. The question now is how well Card's view is able to capture our intuitions about gratitude in these two cases. Let us start with the Grudgingly Grateful Child first. In this case, our intuition was that the child grudgingly writing a thank you note would, indeed, be considered an act of gratitude.

Presumably, parents who insist on their children writing thank you notes want to keep their children from feeling entitled. Entitled children expect others to provide them with gifts without the children having to do anything in return. Entitlement, we might think, encourages a similar kind of asymmetrical power dynamic that Card is trying to avoid by introducing the trustee paradigm. The entitled child feels as if she deserves the gifts being given to her, or that the gifts are owed to her, just as the benefactor in the debtor paradigm feels that he deserves or is owed gratitude by the beneficiary.

Sending the thank you note, even though it was done grudgingly, might be seen as a way to teach the child humility and to see the gift giver as an equal, as opposed to seeing the giver as a person whose only purpose in life is to provide gifts to the child. The act of writing the thank you note teaches the child to acknowledge and respect those who have gone out of their way to provide a kindness to the child. While we might hope that the child will eventually *feel* gratitude towards those who provide an optional kindness to her, for now it is enough to teach her what the act of gratitude requires.

Consider now the Heart Transplant Recipient. In this case, the Heart Transplant Recipient is overcome with gratitude to the point of being metaphorically paralyzed. On first glance, one might think that Card's view would require Heart Transplant Recipient to reciprocate in some way since gratitude, on her view, requires reciprocating goodwill. Supposing this was Card's view, it is unclear how one would go about reciprocating goodwill to someone who no longer exists. Would Heart Transplant Recipient then have an obligation to direct his reciprocated benefit towards the donor's family? Thankfully we can set those worries aside for now because Card's view does not entail elaborate plans of inheritance for unreciprocated obligations of gratitude.

For Card, the function of owing gratitude is to develop and sustain a relationship with the benefactor. We owe gratitude not because we are indebted to our benefactor but because the benefactor has entrusted us with goodwill and relationships require a free flowing of goodwill between two partners of equal moral standing. In the case of the Heart Transplant Recipient, it is not possible to develop a relationship with a deceased benefactor because there is no one left to develop a relationship with. Card would account for this case by saying that he may still be grateful *that* the benefactor was an organ donor or *that* he was able to receive one of the donor's

organs.⁶ To think that he therefore *owes* gratitude to the deceased benefactor is mistaken since, as we said before, the function of owing gratitude is to develop and sustain relationships.

Card's account of an obligation to show gratitude is readily able to capture our intuitions about feeling obligated to show gratitude to others. Her view can explain why we think that the Grudgingly Grateful Child is doing something worthwhile *even if* she only does so grudgingly. It has more trouble, however, accounting for Heart Transplant Recipient's feelings of gratitude. While it may be true that the Heart Transplant Recipient does feel 'grateful' *for* the good state of affairs that resulted from receiving the donor's heart, our intuition was that the Heart Transplant Recipient felt gratitude *to* the benefactor even though the benefactor was deceased. Let us now turn to a second account of gratitude to see if this view can better account for our opposing intuitions of gratitude.

Understanding Gratitude as Primarily a Set of Attitudes

Christopher Wellman, on the other hand, denies that there are duties of gratitude. Gratitude, he argues, should be understood as a virtue since the virtues better capture what goes wrong when someone fails to show gratitude. Consider a case where you go out of your way to do something nice for me because we are friends. A few weeks later, I have an opportunity to do something similarly nice for you, but I decide not to—I figure that my time is better spent on a different project and you would never know that opportunity had arisen. In addition, assuming it were important enough to you and you would make it happen on your own, I am not really depriving you of anything.

⁶ Card, 124.

Card would suggest, in this case, that I have an obligation to reciprocate your goodwill, not because I am indebted to you in the traditional sense, but because you have endowed me with a benefit and I now have an obligation to return that benefit to you at some point in the future in an effort to further our relationship. Wellman, however, would disagree. What went wrong in this case was not that I failed to fulfill my obligation to you, yet you may, rightly, consider me ungrateful. Your moral condemnation, however, is not about my action— your negative reaction is not merely because I failed to do something similarly nice for you. I failed to do something similarly nice for you the entire time between when you did something nice for me and when I had this particular opportunity. You object in this particular instance because I have revealed myself to have a bad moral character—I thought about doing something nice for you and instead decided to act selfishly. What you are objecting to are my callous or selfish attitudes. If this is the case, as Wellman suggests, then speaking in terms of obligations of gratitude does not make sense, at least in this case. We are not all that interested in the action itself; we are concerned with the moral attitudes underlying that action. This is further evidenced by the fact that even if I did decide to do something similarly nice for you, but I only did it because I felt like I *had* to and I resented you for it, you may still, rightly, be upset with me. You may be upset with me precisely because the reciprocated action itself was not the most important aspect of a grateful response. You did not do something nice for me for the sake of calling in that favor later. You did it in order to help me.

On Wellman's view, then, what is of primary importance when thinking about the nature of gratitude is having the right attitudes towards the benefactor as well as the gift. Having the right attitudes and a good moral character will lead us to want to show our gratitude to our benefactors in the right way. If I were less selfish, for example, it would not have occurred to me

to think of doing something nice for you as time better spent working on my own projects. If I had been more generous with my time, I would have been more inclined to give up some time dedicated to my own projects to help you with yours. Having the right moral attitudes will also make me more inclined to perform the right actions.

In light of this view, consider the case of the Grudgingly Grateful Child. As we mentioned above, someone has gone out of their way to give the child a present. In response, the child writes a thank-you note, but only does so after exhausting every possible reason not to write the thank-you note. Imagine being on the receiving end of that thank-you note. You might feel a twinge of disappointment because writing a thank-you note out of a sense of obligation is not sufficiently grateful. It is true that Grudgingly Grateful Child performed the action we would expect to see in a grateful response. The focus of our criticism, however, does not fall on the action she performed; it falls on Grudgingly Grateful Child's feelings. Grudgingly Grateful Child was not *feeling* grateful because she was just going through the motions, grudgingly, because her parents told her she had to. Going through the motions and doing so grudgingly, at least according to Wellman, falls short of what we would consider gratitude.

We might be tempted to say, "Ah, well, Grudgingly Grateful Child is just a child. She is just learning to be grateful. Eventually, after she matures a little bit, her parents' lessons will sink in and she will start to feel grateful in the right way. For now, Grudgingly Grateful Child has performed an action consistent with feeling gratitude and that should be enough for a child to be considered grateful." In response to this Wellman would likely say two things. First, he would say that this way of learning to be grateful is backwards. The idea on this view is that first you learn the rules of performing a grateful action and eventually the grateful feelings would follow. Wellman, on the other hand, would argue that since what we object to is not really about the

grateful action itself—no one objects to the writing of thank-you notes in response to gifts—rather we object to what that action reveals about your moral character. Wellman would argue that the development of character traits comes first, and they will lead to wanting to perform the right action. In practice, he might concede, it is easier to teach children to act in the right way than to feel the right things. That does not mean, however, that the bar for gratitude should be lower for children. Even for a child, performing an action consistent with gratitude without also having the right feelings of gratitude still falls short of being considered sufficiently grateful.

This leads us to Wellman’s second response: It might be that we would be more likely to consider actions done by children sufficiently grateful since they are just learning how to be grateful. Yet if we changed the case slightly to involve an adult, our intuitions become clearer. If an adult were to perform an action consistent with being grateful and yet does so only grudgingly and because he felt obligated to do it, we would immediately say that he is not sufficiently grateful. Consistency, then, would require that we also consider the child not to be sufficiently grateful. Failing to be sufficiently grateful is not the end of the world for either the child or the adult. Failing to be sufficiently grateful is bad in that it would be *better* to be sufficiently grateful, but falling short of gratitude is not always morally forbidden, according to Wellman.⁷ We would not foist blame on the child for failing to be sufficiently grateful and yet we might still be disappointed.

Let us consider now the case of the Heart Transplant Recipient. Unlike the Grudgingly Grateful Child, Heart Transplant Recipient *does* have the relevant feelings of gratitude. He is so overwhelmed with feelings of gratitude that he could not act on those feelings of gratitude, even

⁷ Wellman, “Gratitude As A Virtue,” 1999, 288.

if he wanted to. Wellman's position is that someone who has the appropriate feelings of gratitude will be disposed to act in the right way based on those feelings. Consider the following case: Smith feels grateful to Jones. Yet when Smith sees Jones in need of help, he keeps walking and does not stop to help. Even though Smith has the right feelings of gratitude, he still does not stop when his friend is in need. We might be inclined to criticize Smith for this, Wellman suggests, because if Smith was really sufficiently grateful to Jones, he would have stopped to help. At first glance it may seem as if the Smith case and the Heart Transplant Recipient case are very similar. In both cases the agent has the appropriate feelings of gratitude and yet fails to act on it. Wellman, however, might point to one key difference between the cases: not enough time has passed for us to decide whether Heart Transplant Recipient is grateful or not. He is still very much in the moment. He is still wading through his feelings and making sense of them. Once Heart Transplant Recipient is no longer overwhelmed, we might have a better idea whether Heart Transplant Recipient is sufficiently grateful or not. Yet it is important to note Heart Transplant Recipient is experiencing the relevant attitudes for gratitude in the moment. This is important because it shows that he has the right character traits, yet we refrain from making judgments about why he has not acted on these virtuous character traits because he has other feelings and attitudes as well, and he hasn't had enough time to reflect on how he should act towards those that made his heart transplant possible.

The Dual Nature of Gratitude

At first glance, it would seem that it is impossible to develop a coherent view of gratitude that incorporates the most relevant aspects of both Card's view of gratitude as an obligation and Wellman's view of gratitude as a virtue. On the one hand, it seems intuitively correct that

gratitude is primarily an obligation and it is better to fulfill that obligation than not to do so and better still to fulfill it for the right reasons and with the right attitudes than to fulfill it grudgingly. On the other hand, it also seems right that gratitude is primarily a virtue and having the right attitudes will lead us to perform the right actions. Yet it seems inconsistent to say that gratitude is both primarily an obligation and primarily a virtue. This is because virtue and duty seem to pull us in opposite directions by highlighting two different aspects of morality. I will argue in this section that it is possible to characterize a conception of gratitude that captures both of these views at once because the content of virtue depends, at least in part, on principles.

Why think that virtues should be understood, at least in part, in terms of principles? A common objection to virtue ethics is that if virtue ethics is concerned with developing good character traits and answering the question “what sort of person I ought to be?”, then virtue ethics cannot provide us with the tools to guide our action.¹⁷ Character traits, the thought goes, are inward looking but right action is usually outward looking. How can a theory that emphasizes looking inward provide any real guidance for how to act towards others?

Rosalind Hursthouse, for example, explains the connection between virtue and right action in terms of virtue-rules (V-Rules). V-Rules are rules designed to guide us to what the right action might be but are couched in terms derived from virtues and vices. Honesty is a virtue. The relevant V-rule to guide your action would be to act honestly, or inversely, not to act dishonestly. Charity is another virtue. The relevant V-Rule to guide your action would be, to put it positively, to act charitably or, to put it negatively, not to act uncharitably.

While these rules are action guiding in the sense that they tell us what we ought to do (act charitably, be honest, etc.), they do not seem to be the kind of rules that an inquiring moral agent would find helpful in guiding their actions. The inquiring moral agent who wants to know *how* to

be a virtuous person is looking for a moral theory that can provide some guidance to help us think through possible courses of action and decide how to act. Rules such as “Be honest” are helpful insofar as they tell me that being honest is something I should aim for but unhelpful when it comes to figuring out what an honest person would do in this circumstance. One explanation for why V-rules such as “be honest” or “act charitably” are not terribly helpful for the inquiring moral agent who wants to know *what it means* to be honest or charitable is that the V-rules are derived from the virtues themselves. That is to say that first we have a full understanding of the virtue and then we use that to come up with the rules of right action. This way of approaching the virtues is unhelpful to someone, like the inquiring moral agent, who does not yet have a full understanding of the virtue. What the inquiring moral agent wants to know more about is the *content* of the virtues such as justice, honesty, or gratitude. What sorts of things are the grateful person committed to? What sorts of things will the grateful person never do? My view, which I will lay out below, is that we cannot fully explain certain virtues in the first place without appealing to principles.⁸

Consider the virtue of justice, for example. We do not fully understand the nature of justice without referring to a set of principles that a just person is committed to. If we were to ask about the nature of the just person, we might get the response that the just person will be concerned with fairness and equitability. If the just person is concerned with fairness and equitability, she will be committed to certain principles such as “never deceive another person for your own personal gain,” “give others their due,” or “respect the rights of others,”

⁸ It is important to note, however, that not all virtues depend on principles in this way. Generosity and kindness, for example, might be explainable without appeals to principles.

since failing to act on such principles would be inconsistent with a sincere commitment to fairness.

The kinds of principles I have in mind are quite general. The virtue of justice, for instance, applies in many different contexts. What is just in one context may not be just in another context. The principles that explain justice, then, should be broad enough to explain the virtue of justice wherever the virtue is found. Since the principles underlying the virtues meant to clarify the nature of the virtue, these principles help us to compare and evaluate different conceptions of the virtue of justice by debating the various principles that might be part of that virtue.

The principles of virtue, because they are general, are not hard-and-fast rules we can plug in to any given situation. These principles are more like considerations the virtuous person will take into account than they are like rules. There is no one rule the just person will follow in every situation without exception because not every principle will apply in every case. Not all instances of justice will involve not deceiving another person for your own person gain, for instance. In those cases where the principle against deceiving others is not applicable, it is not therefore impossible for the virtuous person to be just in that particular instances. It is merely that the principle against deceiving others is but one consideration and considerations may not apply in every case.

Not all considerations apply to every situation and not all considerations carry the same weight in every circumstance. In some situations, more than one consideration may apply at once and these considerations may conflict with each other. In the case of punishment, for example, the principles of giving others their due and respecting the rights of others often conflict. A just punishment may mean putting someone in jail, which would be giving the criminal his due, and

yet doing so would violate some of his rights, such as the right to move about freely. In such a case, the principle of giving others their due may outweigh or cancel out the principle of respecting others' rights. That is not to say that by being outweighed or canceled out, the consideration of reciprocity no longer has any normative force. There is still *some* reason to think that respecting the rights of others would be appropriate in this case but there is more reason to think that it would be appropriate to limit the criminal's rights in this case. When such conflicts occur, the virtuous person must assess and deliberate about the various competing considerations.

The principles provide the backbone of the virtue—that is, they provide the structure of any given virtue by setting limitations that distinguish one virtue from another. The broad principles help us to distinguish honesty from justice or courage from temperance. Each of these virtues will have their own sets of general principles that explain the nature of that virtue. What these principles will not do, however, is provide specific guidance as to what the virtue will require you to do in any particular instance. This is why it is important that the nature of virtue depend *at least in part* on principles. The principles supply the foundation on which we build our understanding of the virtue and our understanding of the ideal of the virtue helps to fill in the gaps when considering what we ought to do in any given case.

Principles of Gratitude

Like justice, we do not fully understand the nature of gratitude without referring to a set of principles that a grateful person is committed to. A full understanding of gratitude will, of course, involve having certain feelings or attitudes that cannot be captured in terms of principles.

While a grateful person will tend to have certain feelings or attitudes, those feelings and attitudes of gratitude will tend to lead the grateful person to perform certain actions and avoid others.

For example, if gratitude is characterized by a feeling of appreciation to her benefactor for the benefit she received, the grateful person will, at the very least, be committed to a principle such as “acknowledge your benefactor”. We saw that in the Grudgingly Grateful Child case—the thank you note served as a way to acknowledge, or show respect to, the benefactor. Had the child accepted the gift without acknowledging the benefactor in anyway, we would likely say that the child had not shown any gratitude. In Heart Transplant Recipient, he also acknowledges his benefactor, though in a more subtle way. If, upon waking from his successful heart surgery, Heart Transplant Recipient never once thought about the person whose heart now beats in Heart Transplant Recipient’s body, we might be inclined to think that Heart Transplant Recipient is selfish or entitled. We might tend to think of selfishness and entitlement as incompatible with gratitude while respect, on the other hand, plays an important role in understanding gratitude. Such a principle helps to explain this feature of gratitude.

More principles emerge when we start to think about what goes wrong in instances of ingratitude. Ingratitude involves actively hating or resenting your benefactor. Hating your benefactor, for instance, may be a way of acknowledging your benefactor in the wrong way. If you acknowledge your benefactor by belittling him, that is a failure to show respect. We might think that not only should we acknowledge our benefactors, but we should do so in a way that shows respect for our benefactor.

Often acknowledging your benefactor goes hand in hand with a desire to do something for the benefactor in return. The explanation is usually that it is only fair to do something nice for them since they did something nice for me. The act of doing something nice for our benefactor is

a way to simultaneously acknowledge the benefactor and as a way of communicating to your benefactor that you acknowledge them. As a result, we might consider “reciprocate your benefactor’s benefit with a kindness of your own” as another principle of gratitude. We saw that in the Grudgingly Grateful Child. Sending the thank you note acknowledges the gift giver and communicates to the gift giver that you acknowledge what they have done for you. Often when we think about gratitude, we get caught up in thinking that reciprocation is a *necessary* aspect of gratitude—if you fail to reciprocate, then you are not truly grateful. While it is true that acknowledgment and reciprocation typically go hand in hand, they need not always go together. Heart Transplant Recipient illustrates this. His being overwhelmed by emotion may keep him from being able to *show* his gratitude in the moment but his failure to act does not mean that he therefore lacks gratitude. It is possible for him to be grateful to the donor at this point in time without physically doing anything to communicate that gratitude. In this case, there are other considerations in play that affect the strength of this particular principle.

We might also think that the nature of gratitude includes a principle such as “do not harm your benefactor.” Such a principle can take many shapes. Most obviously, it might mean that attacking your benefactor in response to your benefactor’s act of beneficence is incompatible with gratitude. It may, however, also mean that we should avoid showing gratitude to our benefactor in a way that will shame him, embarrass him, or hurt his feelings. If, for example, your benefactor gives you a nice gift and in response you re-wrap the exact gift he gave you and give it back to him as a thank-you gift, it might hurt your benefactor’s feelings. Even if you did not like the gift, you have plenty of reason to think that such an action might hurt your benefactor’s feelings and so maybe you ought to respond to your benefactor in a different way.

This is not, of course, meant to be an exhaustive list of sufficient conditions for gratitude. These principles do, however, lay out a foundation we can use to understand gratitude. These principles, or considerations, help us to fill out the content of the virtue of gratitude. We might be willing to say that these principles are able to account for considering Grudgingly Grateful Child an example of gratitude. She acknowledges her benefactor by writing the note, she shows respect for her benefactor (as opposed to resentment or hatred), she reciprocates in the form of a thank you note, and she does not attempt to harm her benefactor and yet we still think that she falls short of the ideal of gratitude. This is because the principles only account for *part* of the virtue of gratitude. The ideally grateful person will both satisfy the principles and have the attitudes and feelings we regularly associate with gratitude.

The Ideal of Gratitude

Every year around November 1, Americans, generally, become much more concerned with gratitude because of the impending Thanksgiving holiday. Home décor departments start overflowing with decorative signs that say things like "Thankful Grateful Blessed" or "Be Grateful." Social media is flooded with people sharing their "Month of Gratitude" daily updates. The weeks leading up to Thanksgiving mark a time when Americans collectively remember that gratitude is a virtue, that gratitude is something we should strive for. What we are collectively striving for is an *ideal* of gratitude. This ideal is a stable character trait that involves consistently having the right sorts of attitudes towards the people who provide benefits to you and consistently expressing your gratitude in the right way. Failing to be *ideally* grateful is not always a great moral failing. No one will punish you for being pretty grateful rather than ideally

grateful. The ideal serves as a standard to work towards, not as the bar we must reach in order to be considered grateful.

We might think of gratitude as being on a sliding scale. On one end of the scale is the ideal of gratitude. This is what we are striving for. The ideally grateful person will consistently have both the right attitudes and will express her gratitude in the right way. The other end of the spectrum, however, we might think of this as the low bar of gratitude. At this end of the spectrum we have those who are going through the motions by performing the actions they think gratitude requires without any of the associating attitudes of gratitude or those who have the attitudes of gratitude without showing any signs of wanting to act on those attitudes. Like the Heart Transplant Recipient and Grudgingly Grateful Child, intuitively we identify them as being grateful and yet they are not yet examples of an ideally grateful person. Between these two extremes we have a whole range of grateful responses. The closer we move to the ideal of gratitude, the more grateful we are. For many of us, the holiday of Thanksgiving may be a reminder that there is more we can do to move from the realm of indifference to that of gratitude or to try to move closer to the ideal of gratitude.

To begin our investigation into the ideal of gratitude, consider this case adapted from Terrance McConnell:

Suppose Book Collector is collecting a set of books in a series that has long since gone out of print. She needs only a few more volumes to complete the collection, but she is having trouble finding them. One day, as her friend is browsing through a used bookstore, the friend comes across one of the volumes that Book Collector needs. The friend purchases it and presents it to Book Collector the next day.⁹

⁹ McConnell, *Gratitude*, 52.

Upon receiving the much-needed book, what would we imagine the ideally grateful book collector do in response? First, the ideally grateful book collector (IGBC) would be disposed to act in certain ways. The IGBC would immediately acknowledge the book giver as well as the book. She might say something like “Thank you, Book Giver! I have been looking for this book!” However, the *ideally* grateful book collector would not stop there. She will be disposed to reciprocate in some way.

In reciprocating, there will be some things that the IGBC would, and would not do. For instance, the IGBC would be motivated to reciprocate from a desire to do something to benefit her friend in return rather than from a desire to settle the score. Gratitude, for the *ideally* grateful person, is not about evening the score or making sure debts of gratitude are discharged as soon as possible. Imagine that the book collector, upon receiving the rare volume she had been looking for, went out and bought a book comparable in value for the person who found the book for her. We might think this falls short of *ideal* gratitude because ideally, gratitude should not feel like a transaction. For the same reason, the ideally grateful person would not try to reciprocate immediately or have a stockpile of generic gifts to give someone just in case a situation like this ever arises. This is because the ideally grateful person would reciprocate the benefit at just the right time.

Sometimes the right time to reciprocate might be immediately after receiving the gift. When a stranger saves your child from drowning, the ideally grateful person would, at the very least, thank that person immediately. Other times, the beneficiary should wait to reciprocate until the right opportunity presents itself. For instance, you might find it off-putting when you give a friend a gift and half an hour later the friend has bought a gift for you purely for the sake of discharging his debt as quickly as possible. What the ideally grateful person will not do,

however, is force reciprocation. The ideally grateful book collector, for instance, could have reciprocated the gift immediately. She could have gone out right after work and looked for something—anything—that would sufficiently reciprocate the book her friend had bought for her. There would have been no reason for her to reciprocate immediately in this case. In fact, reciprocating immediately might actually suggest that reciprocation was not something she *wanted* to do but rather it was just one more thing to cross off her to-do list as quickly as possible.

Gratitude for the ideally grateful person is not obligatory, it is voluntary—she is so moved by another’s kindness or generosity that she *wants* to give back. However, she does not just want to give back, she wants to give back *to* her benefactor. So instead of buying a book for her because she bought a book for you, the ideally grateful person will think about what her benefactor might want. The book collector wanted that particular book because she was interested in expanding her collection. That does not mean the book buyer is also interested in books and would like a book in return. She *might* be interested in books, but suppose she is more interested in art. One day while wandering through an antique store you find a painting that you *know* the book buyer would like. The ideally grateful person might pick that up for her just as she picked up a book she knew you would like. The IGBC thought about what her benefactor might like and planned to reciprocate with that in mind.

Reciprocating in this way also means that the ideally grateful person is not solely focused on evening the score but is also focused on the ways in which her gratitude will affect the relationship, or potential relationship, between her and her benefactor. Part of what distinguishes the ideal of gratitude from the ideal of appreciation or happiness is its interpersonal nature. Gratitude, by definition, involves two agents—Person A shows her gratitude to Person B *for* X.

When Person B gives X to Person A, a relationship is formed. It might be a more superficial relationship, as when A and B are strangers to each other and will never see each other again. In other cases, such as with the Book Collector, there might be a more intimate personal relationship involved that the beneficent act helps to shape. The ideally grateful person will be disposed to consider this relationship when thinking about how to show her gratitude. She will be inclined to do this because the impact of the reciprocated gesture will be different depending on this relationship. For instance, cash or a gift card might be an appropriate way to show gratitude if you do not know anything about your benefactor other than the fact that they helped you. But consider what would happen if the book collector tried to pay her friend for the price of the book as well as for her friend's time.

We can imagine that the friend of the book collector would be put off by this. One reason she might be put off becomes clear if we think about what often motivates friends or family members to help each other. Friends tend to want to help their friends not so that they can collect on the reciprocated benefit in the future, but because it is a way to strengthen the relationship. The friend of the book collector had listened to the book collector talk about her book collection and her research and so knew some personal information about her friend. She then used that information when she came across a book that she knew the book collector was looking for. Giving the book was not an act of politeness. She was telling the book collector, "Hey, you're my friend. I care about your research and I wanted to help you with it." It was, essentially, an invitation to further their relationship. If the book collector had responded by paying her friend for the book *and* her time, the friend could see it as a rejection of the friendship invitation: "No, thanks. I do not really want your friendship. However, I do want the book. Here's a little something to make your time worthwhile anyway."

Compare that to the suggestion above that the ideally grateful person would be inclined to choose a return gesture specifically for the benefactor. Although everyone can use cash, if the initial gesture was an invitation to friendship, cash does not usually convey an equal attempt by the beneficiary to try to further the relationship with her benefactor. We might think that friends are concerned with each other's interests. This involves wanting to help friends achieve their ends but, even more basically, it involves being aware of which ends your friends hold. Cash, because it is something that *anyone* would want, does not communicate that you are aware of or care about your friend's ends. But if, as we discussed above, the book collector knows that her friend is really into art and one day you happen upon a painting that you think she will really like, that does more to communicate an acceptance of the invitation to further the relationship than cash would. Ideally, a person would be inclined to show their gratitude by accepting invitations to further her relationship with her benefactor, if it is an option.

In the same way, the ideally grateful person will be inclined to think about her benefactor's feelings before she attempts to reciprocate. She would not, for instance, choose to show her gratitude in a way that is convenient for her but embarrasses her benefactor. Suppose the book collector's friend is extremely shy and hates having attention drawn to her. The ideally grateful person would then be inclined to avoid showing her gratitude by standing up during a faculty meeting to announce how much she appreciated that her friend had bought her a book that she had been looking for.

Although showing gratitude to a benefactor is an important aspect of the ideal of gratitude, ideally gratitude will be accompanied by certain feelings or attitudes. For instance, the ideally grateful person is going to be more inclined to feel some affection for her benefactor and to appreciate both the benefactor herself as well as the gift. We would not look to the Grudgingly

Grateful Child, for instance, as an example of the ideally grateful person. This is because, ideally, gratitude would not be done grudgingly, nor would an ideally grateful action be done from resentment. But this is not to say that gratitude always consists of positive attitudes such as happiness or affects towards the benefactor. Sometimes the ideally grateful response will involve being sad. Heart Transplant Recipient is a perfect example of a case where the ideal response would involve some positive attitudes in addition to sadness. While it is appropriate for Heart Transplant Recipient to experience a sense of relief or happiness after receiving the new heart, if that is *all* he felt, we might think something had gone wrong. While being given a second chance is certainly exciting, the ideally grateful person would keep in mind that these new opportunities are only available now because someone else had lost their life. This is an important feature of the case and one that the ideally grateful person would not overlook.

The ideal of gratitude is something that we should aim for. It is the sort of thing that we should set our sights on as something that would be good for us to be and to act on and yet when we inevitably fall short of the ideal, it is not the sort of thing we would be blamed, or shamed, for. Although the *ideally* grateful book collector might be disposed to return the gesture by thinking about what her friend is interested in (art) and then when she comes across a piece of art she thinks her friend would like, the book collector would buy it and give it to her friend in order to both reciprocate the gift and further the relationship. Yet the book collector's friend would not be offended or upset if instead the book collector thanked her friend in person and then wrote a thank you note. The book collector's friend probably would be offended or hurt, however, if the book collector accepted the book and then acted as if nothing had happened. This leads me to think that there are principles underlying the ideal of gratitude that mark the bare minimum of

what gratitude requires such that if we fail to cross that threshold, we are open to being blamed for failing to be grateful.

Chapter 5: When is Gratitude a Required Response?

Gratitude has a three-place structure: Y is grateful to R for ϕ -ing. If gratitude takes this structure, must I be grateful anytime someone provides me with a benefit? Intuitively we might think that the answer is “yes”. By not showing gratitude when someone helps us or gives us a gift, we run the risk of being considered rude or, worse, ungrateful. Upon closer inspection, however, we will find that the answer cannot be so simple. Must I be grateful to you for holding the door for me? Must I be grateful if you benefit me accidentally? In this chapter I will take up five questions about when gratitude is an appropriate response.

The first question asks whether the benefactor must have provided the benefit intentionally in order for it to be required for the beneficiary to be grateful. In some cases, when a benefactor provides a benefit, she does so intentionally. When you gave me a ride to work, you knowingly and voluntarily stopped, picked me up, and drove me to work. Should I still be grateful to you if you unknowingly drove me to work because I was, unbeknownst to you, hiding in your trunk? Or consider a case where you perform an action without intending to help me but it ended up actually benefitting me in the long run. Should I be grateful to the ex-boyfriend who broke my heart but unwittingly set me on a path of personal development and self-love?

The second question asks whether the recipient must actually be benefitted by the benefactor’s action in order for gratitude to be required. Our gut reaction might be to say “Yes, gratitude is only required when the person receiving the benefit is actually benefitted.” Yet there seem to be cases where gratitude might be called for and yet the beneficiary was not benefitted. Is gratitude owed when someone merely offers to provide a benefit? In such a situation, is gratitude premature? Should the beneficiary wait until the benefit is received to express

gratitude? Alternatively, is gratitude owed when I intended to help you but I ended up harming you instead?

The third question I will take up asks whether gratitude is only required when the beneficiary actually wants or accepts the benefit. Suppose I need a blood transfusion to save my life. I would like to continue living yet I refuse the transfusion for religious reasons. Do I owe gratitude to the doctors who saved my life by giving me the transfusion when I was in a coma and they had no knowledge of my wishes? On the one hand, we might think that I owe gratitude to her doctors because the benefit she received (saving her life) is one that she surely values *even if* it came about in a way that she did not appreciate. On the other hand, we might think that she does not owe gratitude to her doctors because a debt of gratitude is not the sort of thing that can be forced onto people against their will. Further we might wonder whether our intuitions would change if the patient did not appreciate the “benefit” at the time but later, looking back, came to appreciate that blood transfusion. Does it matter whether the beneficiary accepts or wants the benefit in the moment?

The fourth question I will take up asks whether gratitude is only required when ϕ is an action. In most cases of gratitude, ϕ will be an action. I am grateful to you for *saving* my life. I am grateful to you for *giving me a ride to work* when my car broke down. But consider a case of omission: I am grateful to you for not harming me. Can I be grateful to someone for something she has not done?

The final question I will take up in this chapter is whether the benefactor’s providing the benefit must be supererogatory in order for gratitude to be required. On the one hand, we might think that gratitude is owed whenever someone provides a benefit to us, even if it is his job to benefit us. For example, many people think we owe gratitude to the fireman who helped rescue

our cats that had gotten themselves stuck. The fireman was just doing his job. And yet, many of us think that we should be grateful to that fireman for his help rescuing our cats. On the other hand, we might also think that we do not owe gratitude to the person who holds the door for us, but we *do* think gratitude is owed to the person who went out of his way to bring me dinner after my surgery. The puzzle we face is that if gratitude does not require supererogation, we will be constantly bombarded with new obligations of gratitude but if gratitude does require supererogation, gratitude for the fireman may be misplaced.

Must R Have φ'd Intentionally?

Do you owe gratitude to someone who acted intentionally, whose action benefited you, but did not intend to benefit you? Consider the following case:

Mugger: You are being mugged in an alley. I am totally unaware of this and happen to walk by. My walking by frightens your assailant away. Is gratitude the appropriate response?¹

On the one hand, we can imagine being in such a position and feeling gratitude towards our unwitting benefactor. Had I not been in that alley at that exact moment, you may have been injured, robbed, or killed. In some sense it may feel like I have given you a metaphysical gift—I have made real the possible world where you safe and relatively unharmed. For this I am grateful to you.

Yet on the other hand, we might think that beneficence is not the proper object of gratitude. That is to say that merely being benefitted is not grounds for gratitude. Rather, the

¹ McConnell, 26.

proper object of gratitude is benevolence.² Benevolence requires an intentional aim to provide a kindness to another. I did not have an intentional aim to protect you by scaring away your attacker. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time and through good luck, my presence ended up benefiting you. My intention to help you, not my actual helping you, is the proper object of gratitude. In this case gratitude is not the appropriate response for my frightening away the mugger.

Although many philosophers agree that benevolence is the proper object of gratitude, not everyone agrees. Fitzgerald, for instance, thinks it might be possible to be grateful to someone who is intentionally *not* helping you and may even be harming you.³ Consider the case of the Dalai Lama who encourages practicing gratitude toward one's enemies by "telling his audiences that he is grateful to the Chinese for giving him the opportunity to practice love for his enemies. In one instance he expressed gratitude for a different but related reason: because the Chinese gave him training in patience and helped his development as a person."⁴ For Fitzgerald (and the Dalai Lama) gratitude has less to do with the intentions of the benefactor and more to do with the mindset of the recipient. Gratitude, on this view, is about countering anger and resentment. The more I cultivate gratitude, the more grateful and less angry my character becomes.

Fitzgerald means for his Dalai Lama case to be a counterexample to the mainstream understanding of gratitude. I do not think it is a counterexample at all. Both Fitzgerald's Dalai Lama case and the person who thinks gratitude is the appropriate response in the mugger case are guilty of making the same mistake. In both cases gratitude and thankfulness are being confused.

² See Berger, "Gratitude"; Walker, "Gratefulness and Gratitude"; McConnell, *Gratitude*.

³ Fitzgerald, "Gratitude and Justice."

⁴ Fitzgerald, 124.

In the mugger case, for instance, you are feeling happiness and relief and I am the closest or most salient cause, so you direct that positive attention at me through gratitude. But you are not grateful to me for doing anything. I was walking and minding my own business. The more likely explanation is that you are thankful for a certain state of affairs—you are thankful that you are safe when you thought you might have been harmed, you are thankful *that* I happened to walk by at the right time—but you are not grateful to me for anything I did intentionally. Likewise, the Dalai Lama is grateful for a certain state of affairs—he is thankful *that* he was giving the opportunity to practice loving his enemies, he is thankful *that* his experiences taught him to be patient, and he is thankful *that* his experiences have molded him into the person he is today. But none of those things are things the Chinese were actively trying to bring about for him just as I was not actively trying to save you from being mugged. While there may be things you are thankful for, your experience is not diminished because you are not *grateful* to anyone.

Must the Beneficiary Be Benefitted?

In most cases of gratitude, gratitude is the response to being benefitted in some way. Ordinarily the action the benefactor performed is both intended to benefit you and does, indeed, benefit you. The question we are faced with in this section is whether gratitude is the appropriate response when the benefactor's action falls short of providing an actual benefit. First consider a case where the potential benefactor merely offers to help:

Offer: I am struggling to carry an armful of groceries, manage the dog on a leash, and close the trunk of my car simultaneously. A passerby asks if she can help me carry anything. I wave her off saying “No, no. I can manage.”

Would it be appropriate for me to be grateful to the passerby for offering to help? My first question about this case would be: what, exactly, did the passerby do for which I would be

grateful? One suggestion might be that I am grateful to the passerby for noticing my struggle. I can imagine many people, although they do not actually want help, want to know that someone would be willing to help if they had needed it. But if this is what I am grateful for, it seems more appropriate to say that I appreciate the offer, I am thankful that someone noticed my struggle, or I am thankful for your consideration. I am not, however, grateful to you for offering to help me. Although gratitude might not be appropriate in this case, noticing and appreciating the kindness of others is certainly a good thing.

We might think that what kept us from saying that gratitude was appropriate in the Offer case was that the passerby did not even attempt to help. He offered and that was it. What about a case where someone attempts to benefit you but fails?

Weak Swimmer: You are drowning. Someone sees you drowning and tries to swim out to you. He is not a strong swimmer and someone who is a stronger swimmer jumps in and beats him to you.

In this case you have one person who attempted to save you but failed and one person who attempted to save you and succeeded. Gratitude is surely an appropriate response towards the person who successfully saved you. He clearly provided a benefit to you and acted from benevolence. If, upon reaching shore, you had just walked away without acknowledging him in any way, we may, rightly, accuse you of being ungrateful. But would the same be true regarding your actions toward the weak swimmer? At the very least I think we can agree that the ideally grateful person would acknowledge the weak swimmer's effort. It would reveal some good character traits on the part of the ideally grateful person to acknowledge that he had tried. But does that mean gratitude is an appropriate response to the weak swimmer? My intuition is that while it would be good to acknowledge (or be thankful for) his effort, *gratitude* may not be an

appropriate response because you are thankful for a state of affairs—*that* he had tried—but his trying is not a benefit to you at all.

In *Weak Swimmer*, the weak swimmer tried to benefit you but failed. Consider now a case where you accidentally harm someone while attempting to benefit them:

CPR: While walking down the street you see a woman in need of CPR. You are not trained in CPR but no one else is stepping forward to help her. You start pressing her chest to try and get her heart pumping again while someone else calls 911. Your chest compressions succeeded in getting her heart started but, in the process, you broke a few of her ribs.

In this case, unlike the previous two cases, there does seem to be something for which you are grateful. You provided a benefit to the woman in the street by restarting her heart. That is something for which gratitude would be an appropriate response. She is not grateful to you, however, for breaking her ribs. Breaking her ribs might diminish the intensity of the gratitude that is appropriate in this case, that is to say that she might owe you less gratitude than she might if you had not broken her ribs.

Whether Y Wants or Accepts R's ϕ -ing

Must the beneficiary want or accept the benefactor's gift? On the one hand, we might think that the beneficiary does need to want or accept the benefactor's gift in order for gratitude to be owed. It seems dangerous if moral obligations are the kind of thing that can be foisted on people independent of their will. We should have a choice over which moral obligations we accept and which ones we reject. On the other hand, we might think that gratitude should be owed if, at some point in the future, we might come to appreciate the benefit that was foisted on us. Parents in TV shows and movies often say "Someday you will thank me for this" when denying their teenager's request for something he desperately wants. This mentality suggests that

perhaps gratitude *is* owed to the parents even though the teenager does not appreciate the gift in the moment and may not even consider it a gift but rather a punishment.

Let us start thinking about this question with the following case:

Blood Transfusion: Suppose that a Jehovah's Witness needs a blood transfusion to save her life, but she refuses the treatment for religious reasons. If health care practitioners nevertheless administer blood to her, does she owe them debt of gratitude?⁵

In this case, the Jehovah's witness received a benefit that she neither wanted nor accepted. Whether gratitude is an appropriate response may depend, as we discovered in the last section, on whether the recipient sees the benefit *as* a benefit. That is to say, it may depend on the act descriptions. For instance, she may see having her life saved as a benefit and yet she does not see being given the blood transfusion as a benefit. Does that then mean that she is grateful to the healthcare practitioners for saving her life but not for giving the blood transfusion? How are we to make sense of this?

On the one hand, we might say that although she did not accept the blood transfusion—it was given to her against her will—she nevertheless *wanted* the blood transfusion because she wanted to continue living. If this is the case, we might think that because the benefit was wanted, not accepted, yet given anyway, *some* gratitude may be appropriate. Surely the amount of gratitude appropriate in this case would be less than if the gift had been both wanted and accepted. My intuition, at least, is that gratitude is certainly not *required* in such a case. I doubt that anyone would accuse the Jehovah's Witness of being ungrateful if she failed to show gratitude in such a case. An ideally grateful person may express gratitude to the doctors for saving her life, but such an expression of gratitude might be considered supererogatory and she

⁵ McConnell, *Gratitude*, 30–31.

would certainly not be expected to bend over backwards to thank her doctors for giving her a blood transfusion against her wishes.

On the other hand, however, suppose she had neither wanted nor accepted the blood transfusion. Imagine the Jehovah's Witness awoke after surgery and was not happy to be alive because it had meant receiving a blood transfusion that had been given to her against her will. In this variation, it is not clear whether gratitude is appropriate or not. We might think that gratitude is not appropriate because a benefit she neither wanted nor accepted was foisted on her. Intuitively, gratitude should not be the sort of thing that can be forced onto someone. Yet we might also think that the Jehovah's Witness is acting ungratefully because she is failing to see that she has been given a benefit that she *should* want if she values her life. I am inclined to think a Jehovah's Witness that neither wanted nor accepted the gift is not acting from ingratitude because gratitude is not the appropriate response to being forced to receive a benefit.

In Blood Transfusion, although the healthcare practitioners gave the blood transfusion against the wishes of the patient, they had reason to think that the patient would, in the end, think of the blood transfusion as a benefit since it would mean avoiding death. But imagine a case where the benefactor knows you do not want whatever gift or "benefit" she has in mind. Suppose that for your birthday I give you a copy of the game Monopoly. It has been sitting in my basement, untouched, for years. I happen to know that you gave away your copy because you are too competitive, and you have lost many friendships due to this game. I figure that I can kill two birds with one stone by giving this game to you for your birthday: I can clean out my basement while at the same time giving you a birthday gift.

In such a case, it is hard to imagine that gratitude would be the appropriate response. The benefactor did act intentionally and it may seem that, from an outside observer the birthday girl

is benefitting from receiving a fun game that she does not already own a copy of. Yet the truth of the matter is that I did not act from benevolence when I gave you the game that I knew you would not want. I was trying to benefit myself while at the same time attempting to mask my selfishness by making it appear as if I really wanted to benefit you. Gratitude is not the appropriate response when someone is attempting to harm you.

In the Monopoly case, the game was both not wanted and given from selfishness rather than benevolence. To get at the heart of whether gratitude is the appropriate response when you are given a gift you clearly do not want, consider this next case: A mother gets her child a present that she thinks will be good for him—a savings bond! She knows that he does not want a savings bond. It is less exciting than a new toy and it is just one more thing to keep up with and remember about. But the savings bond is, in fact, good for him.

Like the doctors in *Blood Transfusion*, the mom in this case has reason to believe that her actions will benefit you. Does it matter whether you wanted the savings bond or not? Surely we can agree that gratitude would not be out of place had you appreciated and wanted the savings bond. But is gratitude the appropriate response for something you did not want?

One way to approach this case is to say that the child is mistaken about what he wants or that he does not know what he wants. The thought is that the child is not behaving rationally or, perhaps, is not capable of behaving rationally. Some day in the future when he looks back, he will come to appreciate the savings bond that at the time he did not want, and regret not expressing his gratitude at the time.

Another way to approach this case is to say that if a beneficiary accepts the gift, some expression of gratitude is expected. The thought here is that by actively accepting a benefit, even if it is one you do not want, you are being benefitted and so therefore gratitude is the appropriate

response. The amount of gratitude owed in such a case may be lower than in a case where the benefit if both wanted and accepted but gratitude is, nonetheless, the appropriate response. This matches with our intuitions about *Blood Transfusion*. In that case, since the blood transfusion was neither wanted nor accepted, gratitude may not be the appropriate response.

Does ϕ Have to Be an Action?

If we understand gratitude as being a three-place relation—X is grateful to Y for ϕ -ing—does the benefit provided have to be an action? In most cases it happens that ϕ is, in fact, an action. I am grateful to you for picking me up when I was stranded. I am grateful to you for saving my life. I am grateful to you for helping me. In each of these examples I am grateful to you for something you have done for me. Your action has benefitted me in some way. It is not immediately obvious, however, that gratitude must be a response to some action. Is gratitude also an appropriate response to acts of omission? Can I be grateful to you for not harming me, for instance?

Not harming me is an omission and yet we might also think that I am benefitted by not being harmed. Smilansky has argued that gratitude is appropriate in such a case.⁶ He argues that non-maleficence is a benefit. Every day we benefit from the non-maleficence of others. To use Smilansky's examples, we are benefitted when "our mail and children reach our homes safely just because mailmen and bus drivers do not dispose of them by the wayside."⁷ Although many people will argue that it is the job of the mailman and the bus driver to deliver their cargo and

⁶ Smilansky, "Should I Be Grateful to You for Not Harming Me?"

⁷ Smilansky, 586.

gratitude is not the appropriate response for someone doing what they should have been doing anyway, Smilansky argues that these are, in fact, benefits. They are benefits that are regularly overlooked until something goes wrong. When our children are not delivered safely, we suddenly become aware of the benefit that had been provided to us so regularly that we had stopped considering it a benefit at all. We should be grateful to the bus driver every time she delivers our children safely because it was within her power to drive the bus off a cliff or steer the bus into oncoming traffic, yet she delivered our children safely anyway. She could have harmed me but she did not and so I am grateful for that benefit.

If we understand non-maleficence as a benefit, then it might seem that gratitude is appropriate. The bus driver acted intentionally to benefit me (by delivering my child safely) and I both wanted and accepted that benefit. By the criteria we have so far, it seems that Smilansky might be right that gratitude is appropriate in such cases. Intuitively, however, it does not seem right that gratitude would be appropriate for acts of non-maleficence. For one, there seems to be a difference between actively being benefitted and not being harmed. But also, we might think that gratitude is appropriate in cases where providing the benefit was supererogatory. The bus driver delivering my child safely was not supererogatory and so gratitude is not appropriate in such a case. For now, I will take up the question of whether there is a difference between actively being benefitted and not being harmed. In the next section I will take up the question of whether gratitude is only appropriate in cases where the benefit is supererogatory.

Has the bus driver or mailman really benefitted me by doing their job and not dumping their cargo on the side of the road? We can easily understand Smilansky's account of considering non-harms as benefits. When compared to the harm that the malefactor could have inflicted on you, that he chose not to inflict such a harm looks like a benefit. Smilansky is right that we are

constantly presented with benefits that are easily overlooked and that it might be better not to take every one of those benefits for granted. Yet does that entail that we ought to show gratitude to the mailman for delivering my mail, the bus driver who safely transports my children home, or to the mechanic who changes my oil?

What Smilansky is describing might be an illusion. In the *Republic*, Socrates describes how the cessation of pain is often experienced as a pleasure.⁸ When someone has been very ill and becomes well again, the feeling of wellness is quite pleasurable. But, Socrates contends, the cessation of pain is more like a middle state between pleasure and pain. It is more pleasurable than pain, for sure, but it has not yet reached the level of pleasure. We typically find ourselves in this middle state between pleasure and pain. When we smell a pleasant fragrance, for instance, we move up to the level of pleasure. When that fragrance dissipates, we experience less pleasure than we had previously, but we are not therefore in pain. What Socrates is illustrating is that a lack of pain does not necessarily mean we are experiencing pleasure.

In the same way, although we would experience harm if the mailman dumped my mail on the side of the road rather than deliver it safely, it is not obvious then that having my mail delivered as usual is therefore a benefit. It is a lack of a harm. Earlier we discovered that gratitude is a response to benevolence, rather than beneficence. So even if having my mail delivered uneventfully is a benefit to me, the mailman did not act from benevolence and so gratitude is not appropriate. While it may seem like gratitude would be appropriate in such a case, we should not fall for the illusion of a benefit if the benefit is not present.

⁸ Plato, *Republic*, bk IX 583b.

Must the Action Be Supererogatory?

In the most paradigmatic cases of gratitude, the benefactor has done something supererogatory and the beneficiary, in turn, is grateful. When the stranger runs into the burning house to save your child, for instance, gratitude is the appropriate response. The stranger did not owe you anything and he put himself in a dangerous situation in order to benefit you. But is gratitude only an appropriate response when the benefactor has gone above and beyond the call of duty for you? One reason to think gratitude is a response to supererogatory actions is that it seems clear that gratitude is not an appropriate response in every situation in which one receives a benefit. There are many situations in which I receive a benefit from someone whose job it is to provide me that benefit. Consider the following case:

Oil Change: I got to the local mechanic shop to have my oil changed. The mechanic changes the oil and I pay him for his service.

In such a case, my intuition is that gratitude to the mechanic is not appropriate. He was merely doing his job and in return for doing his job, I gave him some money. If I had showered the mechanic with expressions of gratitude, he might have found it odd or even off-putting. Failing to thank him at all, on the other hand, may come off as rude but I doubt anyone would say that I was ungrateful.

But doing one's job and being paid for it does not obviously rule out gratitude being an appropriate response. An oil change is (typically) not the sort of thing that will make a huge impact on one's life while a successful heart surgery, for example, might. The question we are faced with now is whether gratitude is an appropriate response when the benefit has a huge positive impact on the beneficiary yet is done from contractual obligation rather than benevolence.

Heart Surgery: A doctor performs heart surgery on his patient. For the patient, this surgery will increase his expected lifespan and increase his quality of life drastically. The doctor performs these procedures fairly regularly and is paid by the patient for providing this service. Upon waking after the surgery, the patient tells the doctor how grateful he is to the doctor for giving him a new lease on life.

It is not uncommon to hear of a patient expressing her gratitude to a doctor in such a situation. The patient in *Heart Surgery*, for instance, has a strong feeling of gratitude toward her doctor even though he was merely providing the service he was contractually obligated to provide, and from the perspective of the doctor, the surgery is fairly routine and uninteresting. What is motivating the patient's desire to express gratitude is the positive impact the gift will have on his life.

As we discussed earlier, whether gratitude is appropriate does not hinge on the impact of the gift. The proper object of gratitude is benevolence, not beneficence. Merely receiving a gift or benefit does not automatically generate duties of gratitude. Rather, it may be suggested that what makes an action worthy of gratitude is the *gratuitous nature* of the act.⁹ When someone goes above and beyond for us, their action is gratuitous because it exceeds what we see as what we are owed.¹⁰ On this view, if the patient had begun to bleed uncontrollably and the doctor had to perform some complicated maneuvers to save the patient's life, then gratitude might be owed. Even in such a case, it might be argued that even performing those complicated maneuvers are part of his job. If the doctor went in to surgery and said "I am only being paid for performing the textbook procedure and so that is all I will do. If anything else happens, that is too bad." We would be outraged because being ready for all situations that might arise during a particular

⁹ Heyd, *Supererogation*.

¹⁰ Walker, "Gratefulness and Gratitude."

surgery is part of his job! In any event, the surgeon's actions in *Heart Surgery* did not exceed what was owed to his patient and so it is not clear that gratitude is appropriate.

One way we might be able to explain the patient's feelings of gratitude toward her surgeon is that she is thankful for various states of affairs. She is thankful *that* the surgery went smoothly. She is thankful *that* he is still alive and now has a longer life expectancy. She is thankful *that* her surgeon is skilled and well-trained. She is thankful for all of these things and feels the need to express them in some way. Expressing her appreciation for her doctor shows that she is considerate and thoughtful of others, but gratitude is not required in this case.

What, exactly, does a gratuitous action entail? Does it require the benefactor to have given up something of value in order to provide the benefit? Does it require the benefactor to have personally risked something? The doctor in *Heart Surgery* did not have to give anything up in order to provide the benefit (except, perhaps, his time. But it is his job to perform surgery so his time would have been used for surgery whether it had been this particular surgery or not). He did not personally risk anything. His body was never in danger. His job was never in danger. Suppose there was a job where one was being paid to put themselves in danger to help others. Would gratitude be due in that case?

Lifeguard: A tourist is swimming in a public lake and is far from shore. She suddenly experiences cramps and begin to struggle. She is sure that she will drown. Fortunately, however, the lifeguard employed by the city sees that the tourist is in trouble. At some risk to herself (because of the tourist's distance from shore and the tourist's panicky state), the lifeguard manages to save her life. Upon reaching the shore the tourist exclaims "I am so grateful to you for saving my life!"¹¹ (McConnell 16)

¹¹ McConnell, *Gratitude*, 16.

Like the surgeon, the lifeguard was performing his duty when he jumped in to save the drowning tourist. Some will, therefore, treat the lifeguard case just as we did the surgeon case. The lifeguard, because he was fulfilling his duty, has not gone above and beyond in saving the tourist. He was expected to keep his eye on the lake for specifically this kind of situation.

Yet others might think that it is less clear whether or not the patient's gratitude is misplaced. McConnell, for instance, agrees with Heyd that the gratuitous nature of an action will determine whether or not gratitude is appropriate. He disagrees, however, with what is meant by "gratuitous". For McConnell, the gratuitous nature of an act "merely means that a certain motive was not present."¹² What he means by this is that an action is gratuitous if the benefactor's motivations were not to put the beneficiary in his debt or to demand a return favor. If the benefactor's motivations were to genuinely help the beneficiary without looking for anything in return, that action would be gratuitous.

The doctor, on this view, was not acting gratuitously because his motivation to perform the surgery was to make money from the person he was operating on. While his motivation was not necessarily to 'demand a return favor' from his patient, we might think of his payment of a return favor in some way. The lifeguard, on the other hand, while also being paid, does not depend on the drowning tourist for his salary. The lifeguard saves the drowning tourist without expecting anything directly from the tourist in return, although he might save her so as to avoid getting fired.

Yet we might still say that even though the lifeguard's payment does not come from the tourist, it is still his job to rescue the tourist. He is not acting *gratuitously*, he is acting from duty.

¹² McConnell, 23.

From the fact that he did not expect any extra reward from the tourist does not show that he is deserving of gratitude for doing his job. If he had expected an extra reward, we might think he was a corrupt lifeguard who only saves people so he can squeeze money out of them. We might also think, however, that unlike the doctor, the lifeguard put his own safety at risk by saving the thrashing and panicking tourist who was far away from shore. The lifeguard's job description, unlike the doctor's, involves being willing to put himself at risk in order to save others. Although he is being paid to rescue people, the job itself requires the lifeguard to act gratuitously.

Let us take a step back. Our intuitions about whether or not gratitude is due to someone who is performing a paid job may cloud our intuitions about whether gratitude is owed to someone whose actions are not supererogatory. Consider now a case where someone provides a benefit while acting from a moral obligation: Imagine a Christian in Nazi controlled Europe who felt he had a moral obligation to hide Jewish families in his attic. Would gratitude be the appropriate response to him?

There are many similarities between this case and the lifeguard case. For instance, both the Christian and the lifeguard acted without thought for what he might get in return. Although the lifeguard was being paid to keep an eye out for and rescue any drowning people, he saved the drowning tourist without expecting anything from the tourist he saved. The Christian likewise saved Jewish families without expectation that they would do anything for him in return. Not only did he not expect the Jewish families to repay him in some way, he knew that they would be unable to ever physically repay him since they had been stripped of their wealth and power.

Was the Christian acting gratuitously? Like the lifeguard case, there are two ways of looking at whether the Christian was acting gratuitously. On the one hand, we might think that the Christian was acting gratuitously because he was putting himself in harm's way to help

others. He risked being arrested or executed for his actions and yet he did them anyway. On the other hand, we might think that the Christian was not acting gratuitously because he is doing precisely what his moral duty required him to do. Although he was not being paid to save those families, he was receiving the moral satisfaction of doing the right thing.

Intuitively I think gratitude is the appropriate response in both the lifeguard and Christian cases. Although both are acting from duty, their actions have a gratuitous nature. Not all instances of fulfilling one's duty are the same. Fulfilling a duty when it requires putting yourself at risk is more gratuitous than fulfilling a duty when it would require little additional effort on your part.¹³ Both the lifeguard and the Christian made a point of helping others despite having reason not to act due to self-preservation. Both put the needs of others above protecting themselves. Despite the fact that both were fulfilling duties, gratitude is an appropriate response to such gratuitous actions due to the great personal risk they incurred.

Conclusion

We have looked at five considerations that might be factored in when weighing whether gratitude would be an appropriate response. My aim was not to generate a list of necessary and sufficient conditions for when gratitude is appropriate. Rather my aim was to wade through a handful of questions about the nature of ϕ if the structure of gratitude is: X is grateful to Y for ϕ -ing. By thinking through some of these questions, we have a better idea of when gratitude is definitely appropriate and when it is definitely not appropriate. Because these are not meant to be necessary and sufficient conditions, there will remain tough cases that could go either way. This

¹³ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 117.

chapter was not intended to provide answers to those tough questions. My only goal was to elucidate the sorts of questions we should be thinking about when deciding whether gratitude is the appropriate response to receiving a benefit.

Chapter 6: Testing the Principles and Ideal of Gratitude

Thinking about gratitude is easier in the abstract or in pared down cases that highlight specific aspects of gratitude. Those cases are helping in coming to an understanding of gratitude and figuring out the specifics of gratitude. In life, however, cases of gratitude are rarely so clear-cut. It is difficult to pull out the relevant features of gratitude and figure out the appropriate grateful response should be when you are in the moment. When we combine the puzzles of gratitude with the complexities of personal relationships, the problems become magnified. In this chapter we will apply what we have discovered about the nature of gratitude to help us think through a more complicated and realistic case in which gratitude may be owed.

The Case

Farah is childless and would like to have a baby. It is important for her to bear a child (as opposed to adopting) but she would also like to have a genetic tie to her child. She and her husband have tried all sorts of fertility treatments to make this happen, but Farah's eggs just cannot support a pregnancy. She decides to ask her college-aged sister, Ellen, if she would be willing to donate her eggs to Farah and her husband. Ellen agrees. She loves her sister and would do almost anything in her power to help her. Not only does she see this as a way to help her sister but also as a way to strengthen and develop their relationship.

Ellen undergoes a psychological evaluation as well as a physical evaluation to ensure she is healthy and emotionally stable enough for this procedure. She has her eggs and ovaries measured and evaluated multiple times to make sure they are consistently healthy enough. Ten days before the egg retrieval, she begins giving herself shots in the abdomen to encourage as

many follicles as possible to develop into eggs. Every day for the final 10 days Ellen gives herself shots twice a day. During this time her ovaries become full of eggs and she begins to be more uncomfortable. She has to give up running, her favorite hobby, walking is nearly unbearable, and even riding in the car is increasingly uncomfortable. The nearest fertility clinic is an hour away so Ellen, because she is too uncomfortable to focus on driving, has someone else drive her there every other day so a doctor can check on the development of her eggs, make sure they are maturing on schedule, and adjust the dosage of her medicine so that she does not develop Ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS)--a complication that could land her in the emergency room.

The day of the procedure Ellen is half-way put under anesthesia and the doctor uses a vaginal wand with a needle on the end to extract the eggs. The whole procedure takes just a few minutes and Ellen is able to return home the same day. The eggs are fertilized in a lab and 3-5 days later the fertilized eggs are implanted into Farah. A few weeks later it is confirmed that Farah is pregnant!

A few months into the pregnancy, Farah is still elated and getting everything in order before she brings her baby home. She feels like she needs to do something for Ellen to communicate how much she appreciates every Ellen has done over the last few months. It feels wrong to carry on as if nothing had ever happened and so she starts to wonder gratitude is the appropriate response and how to show that gratitude.¹

¹ This case is based on my experience with my sister. I donated my eggs to her in Jan. 2012 and she sent me a check as a token of gratitude.

Is Gratitude Required?

We might start by wondering whether gratitude is the appropriate response in this case. One question we might have is whether gratitude is the appropriate response when someone does something you asked them to do. In this case, since Farah asked Ellen to donate her eggs, we might think that gratitude is not be the appropriate response because gratitude is a response to benevolence. Gratitude, some might want to say, is owed to those who go out of their way to do something nice for you for the sake of doing something nice for you. When someone has to ask you to do it, it carries less weight and so less of a response is appropriate. For instance, intuitively we might not think that gratitude is owed when you have to ask for help crossing the street when compared to the person who saw you were in need and rushed to help. On such a view, what distinguishes the two instances is the gratuitousness of the benefactor's intentions. If they only provided the benefit because you asked for it, that is less gratuitous than if they had provided it willingly on their own. But in the case of Farah and Ellen, we have some reason to think that if gratitude is ever required, this might just be a paradigm case. To explain this intuition, we will look back to our discussion in Chapter 5. In chapter 5, we laid out five features of cases that are generally found in paradigm cases of gratitude: (1) The benefactor acts intentionally to provide a benefit (2) the beneficiary sees the benefit as a benefit, (3) the beneficiary both wants and accepts this benefit, (4) the benefit is something the benefactor actively provided (that is to say that it was not provided due to an omission), and (5) the benefactor's action was supererogatory. In light of these five features, we have reason to think that Farah should, indeed, express her gratitude to Ellen.

Immediately it is clear that by donating her eggs, Ellen intentionally provided Farah with a benefit. Although Farah had asked Ellen to donate her eggs, Ellen still acted intentionally to

provide that benefit to Farah. Ellen decided to act knowing exactly what she was doing, why she was doing it, and for whom she was doing it. Ellen, at least as described in the case, is motivated by benevolence. She wants to help her sister for the sake of helping her sister. The case described above is relatively clear on this point. It becomes clearer when we consider a less paradigmatic case. Imagine briefly a sister who donates her eggs to her sister but does so not from benevolence but due to coercion from the family.² The family, we will stipulate, has made the woman feel as if she cannot say no and so she continues with the donation despite it not being in her best interest. In such a case it becomes much less clear that the woman has acted intentionally. I bring this case up to illustrate the way in which Ellen's action, because she decided to act of her own will and with the ideal intentions, clearly meets the intentionality criteria.

The second feature of paradigm cases of gratitude is that the beneficiary sees the benefit as a benefit. Upon receiving the eggs, it is clear from the case that Farah did, in fact, see the eggs as a benefit. Bearing a child she was genetically related to was something Farah had always wanted and the transfer of eggs from Ellen to Farah made that a possibility. Transferring the eggs as such is not obviously a benefit. Suppose we imagine a case in which someone goes through the egg donation process for the purpose of giving her eggs to a relative who neither asked for nor wanted the eggs. In such a case, the mere transfer of eggs would not be considered a benefit. It might, in fact, be considered strange or a nuisance.

This brings us to the third feature of paradigm cases of gratitude: the beneficiary wants and accepts the benefit. For Farah, the eggs were something that both wanted and accepted.

² I briefly served as a resource for Duke Fertility Clinic by talking to women going through known donations similar to my own. This case is loosely based on the situation of a woman I helped advise.

Farah made her wants clear by asking Ellen to provide them. Because she ended up pregnant, it is obvious that she also accepted the eggs. Compare that to the case mentioned in the last paragraph where a woman gives her eggs to a relative who did not ask for them and does not want them. The relative certainly does not owe gratitude to the woman if the relative neither wanted nor accepted the eggs.

The fourth feature of paradigm cases of gratitude says that the benefit must be actively provided, that is, the benefit was not provided due to an omission. In Ellen's case, going through the process of the donation so that she could transfer her eggs to her sister was clearly an active procedure. This is especially clear if we imagine a slightly different scenario in which Farah drugged Ellen and took the eggs by force. In such a case it would be clear that Ellen had performed an active role in provide the eggs.

So far the criteria we have considered have not given us much reason to think that Farah's asking Ellen to donate her eggs means Farah does not owe gratitude to Ellen. If anything, it seems that by asking, Farah has communicated that the eggs are something that she really wants. Yet we might still wonder whether being asked to do something undercuts one's ability to act from beneficence or to perform a supererogatory action? One might be inclined to think that it does because when you are asked to do something, you do it because they asked you to, not because you are motivated by a desire to help them. We might also be inclined to think that your action was not supererogatory because you were not going beyond the call of duty, you were merely doing what you were asked. This case, however, illustrates how the mere fact that someone asks you to do something does not necessarily undermine beneficence or prevent you from performing a supererogatory action.

Although Farah asked her to do it, we might think that Ellen's actions were motivated by benevolence. We might understand Farah's asking not as a command but rather as an expression of something she would like. Once Farah has made the request, it is up to Ellen to decide whether to fulfill that request. From the case, we know that Ellen's motivation for donating her eggs to her sister came from a desire to help and out of love--not because she felt like she had to or in hopes of getting something out of turn. Had Farah not asked, Ellen might never have known that was something Farah would want. Once she knew, however, Ellen was motivated by a desire to help. As we'll remember, Ellen is in college. Due to her stage in life, she does not have much in terms of monetary resources to help her sister. What she does have is time and her health. Ellen was happy to give what she could to her sister--it was her way of performing an act of love for her sister.

In the same way, although Farah asked Ellen to donate her eggs, her asking does not undermine the fact that donating one's eggs is an act of supererogation. Consider, for instance, the time Ellen had to give up during the process. It takes time to travel to and from the clinic. It takes time to sit in the waiting room. It takes time to get blood drawn and to endure the routine check-ups. She had to take time out of her day to give herself shots. She had to give up time for the procedure itself and to recover afterwards. That amounts to hours and hours that Ellen gave up willfully--a simple thank you could not come close to communicating how much that meant to Farah.

In addition, Ellen had to give up some of her favorite hobbies. Simple things like taking a walk around the block or going shopping would have been nearly impossible and certainly not enjoyable during the last few days of the process. Exercising, especially activities like running, would be off-limits due to the pain and a real risk of damaging her ovaries. Cooking would

require too much time on her feet and moving around. Getting to work, much less actually getting work done, would have been difficult. In short, anything that would have involved moving would have had to be put on hold until after she was fully healed. These were major commitments that Ellen was not required to undertake. Neither her relationship with her sister nor the fact that her sister had asked her obligated her to undertake such risk to herself and giving up so much of her time.

Now that we have reason to think that gratitude might be required in this case, imagine that you are in Farah's shoes. You need to show gratitude to your sister but how does one go about doing that? Often, we can figure out what we ought to do in a situation by looking to similar instances to see what we did there and apply that to this new situation. How do you decide what to do when there are no similar instances to appeal to? In the next section I will use some of the principles we pulled out in Chapter 4 to help Farah decide how to express her gratitude. The principles, we will remember, are quite general and are not designed to provide specific guidance in any particular case. We will fill out the principles by appealing to the ideally grateful person. The principles, in conjunction with what the ideally grateful person would do, can guide us toward a generally grateful response.

What Should Farah Do?

Ellen, the donor sister, had done a tremendous thing for Farah—giving Farah the opportunity to have a child literally changed Farah's life. As a result, I can imagine Farah feeling obligated to reciprocate in some way. Although she may feel obligated to reciprocate, her options for reciprocation are fairly limited. Generally when it comes to returning favors, for instance, it is commonplace to do for them what they have done for you. If someone watches your house while

you are away, it is customary for you to watch their house should they ever ask you to. But in this case, Farah is physically unable to perform the same kind of service for Ellen in return. Ellen donated her eggs precisely because Farah could not provide her own eggs. Doing nothing is not an option either because it will not communicate the magnitude of the gift and worse, may lead Ellen to think that Farah is totally ungrateful. This would leave Farah feeling like she ought to do *something* for Ellen as a token of her gratitude.

Knowing *that* you ought to reciprocate does not provide nearly enough guidance as to what form that reciprocation should take. Imagining what the ideally grateful person would do in such a situation may help to fill out what Farah ought to do. When we think about how the ideally grateful person would reciprocate a gift, we might think that she would reciprocate in a way that is proportional to the gift. If when someone holds the door for you while you are carrying an armful of heavy boxes, you reciprocate by buying them a car, that is clearly not proportional. If someone saves your life by putting themselves in grave danger and you reciprocate by giving them a pat on the back, that is not proportional either.

Saying “thank you”, perhaps, is one way Farah could thank Ellen. However, merely saying “thank you” probably would not feel like enough. One explanation might be that saying “thank you” is sufficient when the action that benefits you involves little effort or cost on the part of the person providing the benefit.³ Your “thank you” acknowledges their effort (as minimal as it may be) and nothing more is required since their minimal effort typically requires only a minimal response. Ellen’s donating her eggs, on the other hand, required significantly more

³ Herman, p. 397

effort and so it would seem that in order for Farah to show her gratitude, she would have to do something more than merely acknowledge what Ellen had done.

For instance, Ellen, the donor sister, had to give up a lot of her time. It takes time to travel to and from the clinic. It takes time to sit in the waiting room. It takes time to get blood drawn and to endure the routine check-ups. She had to take time out of her day to give herself shots. She had to give up time for the procedure itself and to recover afterwards. That amounts to hours and hours that Ellen gave up willfully--a simple thank you could not come close to communicating how much that meant to Farah.

In addition, Ellen had to give up some of her favorite hobbies. Simple things like taking a walk around the block or going shopping would have been nearly impossible and certainly not enjoyable during the last few days of the process. Exercising, especially activities like running, would be off-limits due to the pain and a real risk of damaging her ovaries. Cooking would require too much time on her feet and moving around. Getting to work, much less actually getting work done, would have been difficult. In short, anything that would have involved moving would have had to be put on hold until after she was fully healed. A mere “thank you” may not be able to account for all of the ways in which Ellen went above and beyond what any woman would be expected to do for her sister. Because of this, Farah may want to continue searching for a way to express her gratitude that is proportional (or at least attempts to be more proportional) to what Ellen has done for her.

Farah may also be worried that failing to do something more than just say “thank you” might come across as being ungrateful. She might think that it is not enough to merely have grateful attitudes towards Ellen but she must outwardly show her gratitude. She may feel compelled to do this to show Ellen that her saying “thank you” was not done merely from

politeness. By going above and beyond just saying “thank you”, she would be showing how sincere her thanks are.

Assuming Farah would feel a need to do something for Ellen as a token of gratitude, how might she go about deciding what to give her that would both communicate how meaningful the gift was while also communicating that Farah acknowledges how much Ellen had to give up? How to thank your sister for donating her eggs to you is a social grey area. Often we can figure out what we ought to do in a situation by looking to similar instances to see what we did there and apply that to this new situation.

For instance, we generally know what to do when someone performs a service for you, you pay them for that service. Not all services are equal, of course. The average plumber’s services will cost more than the average babysitter’s services. In general, when we get into these kinds of situations, we have a rough idea of what the going-rate is for the services. We know that if a babysitter charges \$100 per hour, that is too much. We also know that if a plumber charges \$3,000 to fix a leaky toilet, that is also too much. There are going-rates for everything-- airfare, taxis, string quartets--and if we ask around enough, we will get a general idea of what the going-rate is.

Who do you ask to find out the going-rate for your sister donating her eggs to you? Suppose Farah, wanting to find a way to do something proportionate for Ellen, calls the fertility clinic to ask how other people have solved this problem. The therapist at the clinic tells Farah that it is common practice for the recipient of the eggs to financially compensate the donor for

her time and effort.⁴ Usually, the therapist says, since the donor is anonymous, the compensation is built into the contract between the donor and the intended parents. Since there was no such contract between the sisters, some kind of financial compensation is strongly suggested.

In response to this advice, we might have competing intuitions. On the one hand, the option of financial compensation allows for Farah to reciprocate. It is a way to acknowledge what Ellen had to go through. Although no amount of money could ever *repay* Ellen, a check might be a good way to gesture towards how much Farah appreciates what Ellen has done for her. A check would allow for Farah to approximate proportionality. The fertility clinic does this all the time so whatever fee approximates the pain and suffering anonymous donors go through is what Farah will pay Ellen. From the fertility clinic's perspective, sending a check is a way of showing respect for the donor. The payment, we might think, functions as a way of treating the donor as an end as opposed to a mere means. On the other hand, we might worry that there is an important moral difference between sending a check to an anonymous donor and sending a check to your sister even though both women underwent exactly the same procedure.

While it is important to treat the donor with respect whether she is anonymous or known, the way in which we show that respect is equally important. Farah may worry, for instance, that a one-time check may not be able to communicate how grateful she is while a one-time payment for an anonymous donor may not seem like a big deal. In an anonymous donation, a one-time

⁴ This is the case at least in the United States. Fertility clinics are able to recruit potential donors by offering substantial compensation ranging \$1000 to \$10000, sometimes even more. Of course, there are many moral problems tied up with this kind of payment. For the sake of this paper, I will just grant that the payment of egg donors is acceptable since it is common practice in the United States. For further discussion of the arguments for and against the payment of egg donors see: Mahoney (2000), McLeod and Baylis (2006), Daniels (2000), Radin (1987), Tuller (2010), and Craft (1997).

check may be appropriate because the donor will be compensated for her time and effort, the parents will have a baby, and the donor and the parents will go their separate ways never interacting with each other again. When you pay a plumber or taxi driver it is a one-time thing—you pay them for the service they just provided—and we do not think twice about it. At least as far as the fertility clinic is concerned, the same thing is happening in the case of an anonymous egg donation.

Yet an egg donation between two family members, we might think, is quite different. The check might be a one-time thing, but Farah's feelings of gratitude is not. Farah knows that she will be grateful for her sister's action every time she looks at her child and sees a hint of Ellen. A one-time check does not capture the perpetual feeling of gratitude that Farah will experience. Sending more checks would not seem to solve the problem either. Checks, no matter how many you send, will never be able to capture the magnitude of the feelings of gratitude Farah is experiencing.

Not only will the check not account for the constant reminders of Ellen's donation, but cash feels especially impersonal. We tend to have intimate knowledge of the likes and dislikes of our friends and family members. This intimate knowledge means that when it is time to give gifts, we can demonstrate our knowledge of them by picking out something they will really like. When picking out gifts for a stranger or acquaintance, on the other hand, there is less of an expectation for you to tailor that gift specifically towards that person. There can be no expectation that you will know what any given stranger would like or dislike so we tend to stick with generic gifts that anyone would like—fruit baskets, chocolate, cash, etc. Since the intended parents know very little about the anonymous donor, we might think a check is a perfectly

acceptable way to express their thanks. Farah, on the other hand, knows much more about Ellen and so we might worry that sending a check might be too impersonal in this case.

Respecting the benefactor also means considering how your expression of gratitude will affect them. The ideally grateful person would not, for instance, express her gratitude in a way that will offend, embarrass, or hurt the feelings of her benefactor. When considering whether Farah should take the therapist's advice and send the check, we should think about what effect the check might have on Ellen.

Imagine being put in Ellen's position. You finished the egg donation process a few months ago and now you find yourself opening an envelope from your sister to find a note and a very generous check for a few thousand dollars. What sorts of feelings might arise in you? Perhaps you would feel thankful—one can always use an extra few thousand dollars. Or maybe you would feel appreciated since your sister recognizes all the time and pain you put in. These are, of course, the sorts of feelings that Farah would hope to elicit in Ellen. But among all those feelings, one might imagine Ellen might have some darker feelings too. She may feel offended or even hurt.

I can imagine that Ellen might feel offended if she interpreted receiving the check as if Farah was trying to “even the score.” Ellen, of course, knows that Farah could never “even the score” exactly but it would be understandable if Ellen thought the check was Farah's way of discharging that debt so that it would not be hanging over her any longer. This kind of debt could disrupt the power dynamic between the sisters since Ellen would “have the upper hand” until the debt was discharged. So, the thought goes, discharging the debt would make the sisters ‘even’ again. Supposing Ellen interpreted the check in this way, I can imagine this being troubling for her. On the one hand, she could see the check as Farah's way of thanking her for everything she

had done. Ellen could appreciate how hard (nearly impossible) it is to thank someone for such a significant gesture, and she could appreciate Farah's need to show her gratitude to Ellen. And yet I can imagine it would be difficult to put aside the feeling that Farah is merely "discharging" her debt so they could return to normal.

Returning to normal, though, would mean returning to the way they were prior to the donation. I can imagine that the thought of Farah wanting to return to their pre-donation relationship would lead to some hurt feelings due to certain expectations Ellen might have had going into the donation. For instance, we know from the case that Ellen was motivated, at least in part, to donate her eggs to Farah because of the love she has for her sister. With this kind of motivation, we can easily imagine that Ellen would have an expectation that their relationship would be stronger than it had been going into the whole process. This expectation would not be irrational since gifts in general, but especially gifts of this magnitude, tend to move a relationship to a "significantly new level of intimacy, intensity, or commitment."⁵ If Ellen interpreted the check as communicating that Farah, the recipient sister, does not want that and instead wants to return to what they had before the process began, it would be understandable to Ellen to feel disappointed or hurt.

Similarly, she might also be hurt if she understood the check to mean that "returning to normal" means pretending like Ellen does not have a special connection with the baby. I can imagine Ellen having an expectation of having a different kind of relationship with the baby than she would have had with him/her if she had been conceived naturally--that she would not be just any aunt but a *special* aunt. Pretending like the egg donation had never happened would be a

⁵ Camenisch, 16

disappointment since she was motivated by the idea of having a stronger relationship both with her sister and the baby. In either case I can imagine that this thought would leave Ellen feeling used.

Ellen might also feel hurt to receive such a check. Ellen was very clear about her motivation for helping her sister—she did it out of love and a desire to help her sister. Friends and family do what Jane English would call “voluntary sacrifices.” We will do something for our friends and family not because of what they might do for us in return but because we genuinely enjoy their company, or we want to continue having a relationship with them.⁶ This seems like the way Ellen was thinking about donating her eggs to her sister. Ellen wanted to further develop her relationship with her sister and that includes not keeping track of and not balancing out any debts might arise between them.

The anonymous donor, on the other hand, is not providing a voluntary sacrifice. She is making a very calculated offer—she has decided that the amount of money you are paying her is adequate to compensate her for the time and effort and effort involved in donating her eggs. She would not perform the service for free and she would donate her eggs for anyone who is willing to pay her. The anonymous nature of the donation means that there is no friendship to continue or tend to. The same would be true the mechanic who works on your car or anyone who performs a service where it is implied that he or she will be paid for that service. Because there is no relationship to continue or to tend to, the payment becomes a transaction: if you provide the service, I will provide the payment. This may be what Ellen is reacting to. She had intended her service to be a voluntary sacrifice and yet the check was communicating to Ellen, the donor

⁶ Jane English “What Do Grown Children Owe Their Parents”, See also Swinburne p. 65

sister, that Farah saw her service as a calculated offer—that Farah felt like she needed to send the check to complete the transaction.

The check was meant to be, at least in part, a way for Farah to discharge the debt of gratitude she felt she owed to Ellen. Discharging a debt of gratitude can be tricky because if the person who was benefited decides to show her gratitude to her benefactor by doing something too similar in kind or too close in value, the benefactor may interpret that as a form of payment or even as an attempt to reject the benevolent gift.⁷ Swinburne explains that such an interpretation is reasonable since “by accepting a gift I encourage a friendship, which by not expressing gratitude I refuse to develop.”⁸ This explanation is helpful because, as Ellen saw it, Farah accepting the eggs was an encouragement of the development of the friendship between the two sisters. And yet since a check is not able to communicate that Farah did, in fact, want to develop the friendship between her, the check might be interpreted by Ellen as a refusal to develop the friendship. Since check might be interpreted as being too close in value to the time, effort, and pain Ellen experienced, Ellen might understandably feel as if a transaction had just taken place. Not only that but I can imagine that the check may make Ellen feel unappreciated or as if she had been used.⁹ She might have felt as if she had misunderstood what was happening when she donated her eggs. She thought she was doing one thing—namely strengthening her relationship with her sister—yet Farah thought she was doing another thing—providing a service—but anyone could have provided that service.

⁷ Camenisch, 12

⁸ Swinburne, 65

⁹ Camenisch, 4

A check, then, we might worry, might not be the best option in this case. There is no guarantee, of course, that Ellen would interpret receiving a check in any of these ways. But a check does run the risk of misinterpretation. The ideally grateful person would probably not want her act of gratitude to be misinterpreted in these ways unless she was sure that Ellen's feelings would *not* be hurt by receiving a check.

What would the ideally grateful person advise Farah to do instead? Unfortunately, no principles of gratitude will be able to provide Farah with a definite answer. Yet we might think that they could guide Farah towards any number of alternative gestures. The principles, for instance, might encourage Farah to choose a gesture that better reflects her relationship with Ellen. This will require reflecting on what Ellen likes and the nature of their relationship. If both Ellen and Farah enjoy eating and trying new restaurants, perhaps Farah could use the money she would have sent Ellen to take her out to try a couple nice restaurants. Or perhaps Ellen is more sentimental and would better appreciate a symbolic gift. For example, a ring with the baby's birthstone surrounded by a circle of Ellen's birthstones might be an appropriate gesture. The symbolism built in to the ring--that Ellen and the baby who grew from her eggs will be connected forever--required some thought. Farah would have had to search for a ring that met these exact requirements and that was in a style that Ellen would wear and enjoy. With this kind of gesture, Farah would still be able to thank Ellen and show her appreciation *for Ellen* while at the same time conveying very clear messages to Ellen that the whole egg donation process was more than a transaction for Farah and that Farah embraces and values this new way that she, her baby, and Ellen are connected. Or perhaps relationships themselves are most important to Ellen. In that case, making time to spend with Ellen or giving Ellen dedicated time to spend developing her own relationship with the baby might be the best way to express her gratitude.

These are only three examples but there are an infinite number of alternatives and variations. There is no one right way to express gratitude. The principles of gratitude might guide us toward certain expressions of gratitude (such as ones that express respect for the benefactor) and away from others (such as ones that may result in a benefactor's hurt feelings) but they cannot direct us directly to the right expression of gratitude. The ideally grateful person will factor in other features of the case such as the relationship between the benefactor and the beneficiary and balance these considerations in a way that will express just the right amount of gratitude.

It is not always easy to know how to show your gratitude to a friend or family member. Sometimes a simple thank you is all that is required to acknowledge their service. Other times it seems like just saying thank you is not enough to convey just how thank you are to them for the serve they provided for you. Figuring out how to thank them without it seeming like you are doing it out of obligation or undermining your relationship with them can be trick. This case of egg donation between sisters is intended to be an example of just this sort. The principles explored in Chapter 4 can provide us some insight into what we ought to do in such tough cases by helping to break down such complex cases and highlighting some important considerations. The ideal of gratitude can help us to fine tune these considerations so that our actions are appropriate for any given situation.

Chapter 7: Punishment and Gratitude

Gratitude is generally assumed to be a good worth pursuing. Self-help sections of bookstores are full of books claiming that they can help you become more grateful and stores are full of decorative pillows and knickknacks reminding us to be “Grateful, Thankful, Blessed” as if it is obvious that we should all be striving to be grateful. The problem, however, is that it is not immediately obvious *why* gratitude is morally justified.

One way to approach justifying gratitude is to look for another concept that has the same structure as gratitude, see how that concept is justified, and see if those arguments, when applied to gratitude, provide a justification for gratitude as well. This is the approach I will take in this chapter. Punishment, I contend, has an inverse structure to gratitude. Where gratitude is seen as returning morally good with morally good, punishment is seen as returning evil with evil. By drawing this deep analogy between punishment and gratitude, I will suggest that some justifications we use for punishment might also be used to justify gratitude. If this is the case, we have reason to think that the justifications for gratitude and punishment stand and fall together.

Gratitude, as we discussed earlier in the dissertation, has a three-part structure—X is grateful to Y for ϕ -ing. ϕ , on this model, is some action that was done intentionally by Y in an effort to benefit X. In return for intentionally benefiting X, X should now do something in kind for Y. The basic intuition driving our conception of gratitude is that the good morally ought to be met with good. When someone does something kind for you, you should do something kind for them in return.

I understand punishment as having a similar, but inverse, structure. We generally understand punishment as also having a three-part structure: X punishes Y for ϕ -ing. ϕ -ing, on

this model of punishment, is some action that was done intentionally by Y in an effort to harm X. Harming on this model might take various forms. X might punish Y for insulting him or for stealing from him, for instance. The thought behind punishing is that in return for harming X, X is now justified in harming Y in some way, perhaps by putting him in jail or punching him. The basic intuition driving our conception of punishment is the inverse of the intuition driving our conception of gratitude: evil ought to be met with evil. When someone does something to harm you, it is only fair for them to suffer harm in return.

We generally think that punishment is morally justified though we may have fundamental disagreements about why we think punishment is justified. Some might think punishment is justified because it is in the best interest of our society to punish those who do wrong. Others might think that punishment is justified because our sense of justice tells us that it is fair to meet evil with evil. At the end of the day, regardless of our reasons, we tend to agree *that* punishment is justified. In the rest of the chapter I will look at three general approaches to justifying punishment—consequentialist justifications, appeals to relationships, and deontological justifications. For each of these approaches I will lay out an explanation for why we have reason to think that analogous arguments might be used to justify gratitude.

Consequentialist Justifications of Punishment and Gratitude

Punishment is sometimes justified by appealing to consequentialism. The consequentialist, as the name suggests, is concerned with the consequences that will be produced if an action is taken. In the case of punishment, punishment is justified if the act of punishing will produce a better outcome than not punishing. There are two main approaches to justifying punishment in this way. The first is an act consequentialist justification. According to this view,

punishment in a given case is justified so long as that particular act of punishment produces better consequences than refraining from punishing. The second approach is rule consequentialist. On this view, the practice of directing punishment towards a wrong-doer is justified because the practice generally produces the best consequences. In this section I will provide a brief sketch of the two traditional consequentialist justifications for punishment and then I will apply the same principles to gratitude to see if this results in a plausible justification of gratitude.

Act Consequentialism

Particular acts of punishment are sometimes justified by appealing to act consequentialism. Act consequentialists justify individual acts of punishment by comparing the consequences we can expect if we direct punishment towards a particular wrongdoer with the consequences we can expect if we do not punish the wrongdoer. If punishing produces the best consequences in this case, that act of punishment is justified. Suppose we are aiming to promote happiness. Punishment will be justified insofar as it helps us move towards the goal of promoting happiness. When faced with the decision whether or not to punish the murderer, for instance, we have to ask ourselves whether punishing the murderer will produce more happiness than not punishing the murderer. Refraining from punishment and allowing the murderer to go free will give the murderer more opportunity to commit murder in the future, thereby decreasing the happiness of those he kills, and will not give murderers anything to disincentivize them from murdering again, thereby decreasing the happiness of members of the wider community. The murderer's happiness, on the other hand, will be maximized because he will get to enjoy his freedom. Punishment, whether in the form of jailing or the death penalty will remove (at least

temporarily) the opportunity for future murders and will disincentivize potential murderers from murdering, increasing the happiness of the potential victims and the community as a whole. The murderer is less happy because his freedom is taken away. When we consider which option will produce the most happiness, punishing the murderer comes out on top because it leads to the consequences that result in the happiness overall. Using this consequentialist reasoning, individual acts of punishment, then, are justified in such cases when the amount of happiness produced by punishing someone outweighs the unhappiness experienced by the guilty party.

Gratitude, we might think, has a similar structure. Where punishment is what one receives when one performs an evil, gratitude is what one receives in response to performing a kindness for someone else. What justifies returning evil with evil might also justify returning morally good with morally good. In ideal cases of gratitude, the beneficiary will *want* to express their gratitude. The gift she received makes her happy and she wants to share that happiness with her benefactor by doing something to reciprocate that kindness. When an act-consequentialist beneficiary is weighing whether or not to show gratitude to her benefactor, she will ask herself whether showing gratitude will produce more happiness than not showing gratitude in this particular situation. Generally, the beneficiary will experience happiness when doing something kind for her beneficiary and the benefactor is happy the beneficiary is happy and appreciates the beneficiary's gesture.

Compare that set of consequences to the consequences that would generally result when a beneficiary fails to express gratitude. For example, suppose the beneficiary is indifferent to the gift or, perhaps worse, does not acknowledge the gift at all. In this case, the beneficiary's happiness is not increased at all. The benefactor, having been snubbed, may now have hurt feelings or, at the very least, she is neither happier nor unhappier. If the consequentialist is

aiming to promote happiness, the first scenario where the beneficiary expresses gratitude will tend to result in more happiness than failing to express gratitude at all.

Yet this consequentialist justification of gratitude cannot be the full explanation of why gratitude is good and worth pursuing. This is because there will certainly be cases where the good of consequences resulting from acts of gratitude do not outweigh the good of consequences resulting from not showing gratitude. For example, gratitude may not be worth it if your benefactor has terminal cancer and will die tomorrow. The effort required to show gratitude to such a person, even if it results in making your terminally ill benefactor happy, will outweigh the benefactor's happiness because his happiness will be short lived. We might also think that even if expressing gratitude will further develop your relationship with the terminally ill benefactor, it is futile to further develop a relationship that you know will end tomorrow. This does not match my intuitions about gratitude. My intuition is that we ought to show gratitude to our benefactor *even if* he will die tomorrow. This is because even if the benefactor's happiness does not outweigh the effort, I must go through to express my gratitude, there is something else that explains why gratitude would still be morally good even when your benefactor is terminally ill.

Rule Consequentialism

We might think that a better approach to justifying punishment and gratitude is to justify the practice rather than individual acts of punishment or gratitude. The practice of punishment in general, we might think, is justified because having the practice produces the best consequences

overall. Rawls lays out a similar argument in his paper “Two Concepts of Rules”.¹ There, Rawls draws a distinction between justifying a particular action and justifying a practice as a system of rules.² The worry, as Rawls see is, is that the act utilitarian view may justify too much.³ Just as we saw in the terminally ill benefactor case above, the act utilitarian may be able to justify not showing gratitude to the benefactor even though our intuitions tell us that we should. One way to guard against this is to distinguish “between the justification of an institution and the justification of a particular action failing under it.”⁴ The institution of punishment is made up of laws which limit the instances in which particular acts of punishment may be inflicted. It may be justified to punish someone by taking away some of his rights (such as his right to move freely) when certain conditions may been met, such as: he has violated a law, the law is clearly stated along with the resultant penalty for its violation, that violation has been established in a fair trial, he has been found guilty of the crime in question, the punishment will be carried out by the appropriate authorities, and so on.⁵ Such a system is justified, Rawls suggests, because in the long term, this system will have the consequence of furthering the interests of society. It is in the interest of society to have systems in place that promote fairness by having rules in place to ensure only the guilty are punished and that the rules will apply equally to everyone.

Just as we have a practice of punishment that is justified by considering the benefits to society as a whole, we have a practice of gratitude that may also be justified by considering the benefits to society as a whole. The practice of gratitude consists of certain conventions such as

¹ Rawls, “Two Concepts of Rules.”

² Rawls, 5.

³ Rawls, 7

⁴ Rawls, 7

⁵ Rawls, 7

reciprocating acts of kindness and directing our gratitude toward those who have benefited us. This practice is valuable above and beyond the value of the individual acts of gratitude because the practice itself furthers the interests of society. It is in the interest of society to have a citizenry who are willing to help each other and to graciously accept help when needed because this will tend to promote the kinds of trust and relationships that protect a society from crumbling due to resentment and in-fighting. Gratitude will tend to strengthen the bonds between people which will, in turn, strengthen the bonds connecting society as a whole.

Imagine a society that does not encourage such a practice and as a result, a benefactor's kindness is routinely met with coldness or indifference. Benefactors will be less incentivized to do nice things for others in the future. Why take the time and energy required to provide benefits to anyone if you will not receive anything in return? We can imagine that this would result in the individuals of that society becoming isolated because there is no reason to go out of your way for other people. It is in the interest of society to promote practices that encourage community building and working together and discourage practices that would lead to isolationism and resentment.

Let us think back to the terminally ill benefactor case mentioned above. The rule consequentialist will have an easier time accounting for our intuitions that we should still show gratitude to our benefactor *even if* we know he is going to die tomorrow. The rule consequentialist will say that the practice itself is valuable even if it is unclear whether this particular act of gratitude is justified. This is more satisfying than the act utilitarian's account because it makes room for showing gratitude to the terminally ill benefactor by justifying the practice itself. Yet we may still worry that this is not a completely satisfying account. We might still think that gratitude in this case is justified not merely because the practice is justified, but

because our relationship with the terminally ill benefactor is important and gratitude plays an important role in developing relationships.

Punishment, Gratitude, and Relationships

In the most ideal relationships, both parties are committed to developing the relationship for the sake of the relationship. Neither party is keeping score of who provided what to whom and friends are happy to provide benefits for each other, not because of what they will immediately get in return, but because the benefit will lead to developing or maintaining a relationship. Healthy friendships thrive when both parties feel that they are equal partners and are equally committed to developing and sustaining the relationship. Gratitude and punishment play similar, but inverse, roles in developing and maintaining relationships.

In thinking about the role gratitude plays in developing friendships, let us think back to the egg donation case in the last chapter. Ellen donated her eggs to Farah out of love for her sister and a desire to push their relationship to a new level. She was not motivated by what she might get in return—such as monetary compensation—but by a desire to do something for her sister that no one else could. The way Farah responds will have a huge impact on the state of their relationship. If she were to resent Ellen after the fact and treat her with coldness or avoid Ellen at all costs, this would communicate a non-willingness to continue the relationship. Treating a friend as a mere means, as Farah would effectively be doing since she used Ellen to get her eggs and then discarded her, undermines the relationship since relationships are built on mutual respect and trust. Showing gratitude when our friends do something exceptionally kind for us is one way in which we show respect to them.

Not only do we use gratitude to communicate our mutual respect between friends but we also use it to return our friendship to an equilibrium. Farah felt an obligation to do something for Ellen because she felt as if she would be eternally indebted to Ellen otherwise. Ellen donating her eggs to Farah effectively changed Farah's life. Doing nothing might leave Farah feeling as if she was always playing catch up. A friendship where one person has more power is potentially dangerous. It may lead to friends constantly trying to one-up each other in an effort to get the upper hand or may lead to an abuse of power in which the friend with the most power can exert control over her friends. A friendship formed around wanting to gain power is less than ideal. Ideally, friends would have equal power in a relationship and so gratitude is one way in which we can bring the two parties back to equilibrium. By expressing gratitude, the friend who had been in the inferior position now has relatively more power and is back on equal terms with her friend.

Something similar might be happening in the case of punishment between friends. Whereas gratitude is the response to a friend doing something kind for you, punishment (of a type) is the response to a friend who has wronged you. When a friend wrongs you, punishment in the form of blame or censure may be justified. Just as gratitude is one way in which we can communicate mutual respect within a friendship, we might think that censure is a way in which we communicate that respect is lacking and something must be done to ameliorate the situation. Once reparations have been made, usually in the form of an apology or acceptance of guilt, the apology is accepted and the equilibrium within the friendship has been restored.

Consider the way in which parents punish their children. When a child misbehaves, by dashing out into the street, for instance, the parent might punish the child by scolding her and she will promise not to do that again. In ideal cases, once the punishment has been administered, the

equilibrium between parent and child is restored. The lessoned has been learned and so both parents and child continue on just as they had before the incident. Ideally, parents would not continue to punish the child after the lesson has been learned. The same is generally true of friendships. Once the friends have forgiven each other, the equilibrium has been restored and the censure has been terminated. In ideal friendships, the censure does not continue after the act of forgiveness.

This system of punishment and forgiveness is a normal function of friendship. In ideal friendships, punishment is reserved for only the gravest instances. We might think a friendship characterized by constant punishment and forgiveness is dysfunctional. Imagine a case in which a wife constantly censures her husband, the husband routinely apologizes, and the wife, in turn, forgives the husband only to start the cycle again the next day. We might think of this case as an inverse of the situation mentioned above in which two friends are constantly trying to gain the upper hand in the relationship by trying to get the other to owe a debt of gratitude to them. In both cases we might think the problem is one of *too much* punishment or gratitude. Punishment and gratitude are important for friendship insofar as they lead to a development of the friendship. In these two cases, neither the punishment or the gratitude are serving the purpose of strengthening the ties between two people.

Deontological Justifications of Punishment and Gratitude

When it comes to punishment, often we do not have the ultimate consequences in mind when we judge a punishment to be justified. Punishment is sometimes also justified by appealing to retributive justice. Retributive justice can be broken down into three parts: (1) the malefactor, having done something bad, *deserves* to be punished, (2) the punishment will be directed to the

person who committed the crime, and (3) a fair punishment will be proportional to the crime.⁶

Gratitude takes a similar structure. Gratitude is often justified by appealing to reciprocal justice which can also be broken down into three parts that mirror retributive justice: (1) the benefactor, having done something good, *deserves* to be recognized, (2) gratitude will be directed to the person who supplied the benefit, and (3) the proper amount of gratitude will be proportional to the benefit received. In the remainder of this chapter I will compare the justifications of these three parts and the principles of gratitude that result.

The first justification of punishment under retributive justice is that the malefactor *deserves* the punishment he receives. When someone steals from you, that person *deserves* to be arrested and put in jail. When someone lies under oath, we think that person *deserves* to have some of his liberties taken away. We generally think it is unfair for a bad guy to get away with doing something bad without getting caught and being punished.

A similar phenomenon occurs with gratitude. We generally think that when someone does something kind for someone else, the benefactor *deserves* some recognition or a reciprocated response in the form of gratitude, or even that gratitude is owed to the benefactor. Sayings like “I owe you one” or “I am indebted to you” reflect this understanding of gratitude. Kant, for instance, took this position on gratitude.⁷ When someone provides you with a benefit, it is common to feel that you are indebted to that person until you are able to discharge that debt. While this may sound too transactional to fully account for gratitude, it does tend to track our

⁶ Bedau, Hugo Adam, and Erin Kelly. “Punishment.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, 2017.

⁷ Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 27:697.

intuitions. We generally do feel at least a little indebted to someone who does a kindness for us. Suppose someone were to provide you with a significant benefit, you agree that it is a significant benefit, but you respond with complete indifference. Your benefactor may rightly think that you have failed to give him the respect or the acknowledgment he deserves. That is not to say that the benefactor thinks he is entitled to any particular act of gratitude rather than he might think he is entitled, at the very least, to some respect.

This pull towards reciprocal justice tracks one of the principles of gratitude we came up with in Chapter 4: acknowledge your benefactor. Gratitude is a response to a benefactor's beneficence and that requires first acknowledging your benefactor. Acknowledging others, especially those who have done something nice for us, is the basis of respect. Respect is morally good and one way to explain the moral importance of respect might be to appeal to Kant's Formula of Humanity. The formula of humanity states that we ought to respect humanity, whether in ourselves or any other, never merely as a means but always at the same time as an end. The formula of humanity, like gratitude, keeps us from merely using people to further our own ends. Imagine, for instance, a case where a child is drowning in a pool and a stranger jumps in to save him and drags the child to the edge of the pool. The child's mother ignores the stranger and takes the startled (but otherwise fine) child home. What has gone wrong in this case is that the mother has accepted the stranger's benefit (saving her child) and then carried on with her life as if nothing had happened. In doing so she has failed to recognize the stranger as a person who has his own ends.

Let us turn back to the terminally ill benefactor case. The formula of humanity tells us that we ought to respect humanity wherever it is found. The terminally ill benefactor has humanity as long as he is alive. The question then becomes whether a failure to express gratitude

is a failure to respect the benefactor's humanity. When the drowning child's mother ignored her benefactor, she failed to recognize her benefactor's humanity and the ends the stranger has set for himself. Is the same thing happening in this case if we choose not to express gratitude to the dying benefactor? One difference, we might think is that while the dying benefactor has ends, he does not have them for much longer. The formula of humanity, however, is not open to exceptions so the fact that the benefactor is dying makes no difference when we are wondering whether or not to respect someone's humanity. We ought to acknowledge the dying benefactor *as* a benefactor *even though* he is dying. This explains at least part of our uneasiness with the utilitarian justification of gratitude.

This leads us to the second justification of both punishment and gratitude: it is directed *to* a particular person. In the case of punishment, the punishment is directed to the person who committed the crime. We tend to think that something has gone wrong in the justice system if someone is punished for the crime another person committed. It is only fair for the person who committed the crime face the penalties associated with that action. But there is another way to think about directing the punishment to the person who committed the crime. Consider the way parents punish their children. Parents will often tailor the punishments to the particular child being punished. If, for example, the child would prefer to stay home on a Friday night, grounding the child by telling her she cannot go out on Friday night would not be much of a punishment whereas for a different child, that might be a very effective punishment. If we want to punish someone, then, we have to choose a punishment that will be effective in punishing that person.

Similarly, for gratitude, we tend to think something has gone wrong if gratitude is not directed to the benefactor. We might think something has gone wrong if I do something nice for you and you direct your gratitude to my brother instead of to me. It is good that you want to

express your gratitude, but the ideally grateful person will direct it to the right person. Just as parents tailor the punishments to a particular child, we might also think that we ought to tailor our gratitude to our particular benefactor. If, for example, you know your benefactor does not like to be touched, perhaps hugging her is not a good way of showing your gratitude. While showing gratitude is good, showing gratitude in *that* way is not because it fails to respect the benefactor as an individual. Showing gratitude in the same way to every person is similarly failing to respect your benefactor as an individual.

This leads us to the third justification of both gratitude and pleasure: it must be proportional. We cannot express gratitude to everyone in the same way every time partially because that fails to respect your benefactor as an individual but also because a hug or a potted plant will not always be a proportional response. A different response is called for when someone waters your plants while you are out of town and when someone saves your life. In the same way, not all punishments are proportional. A fine, for example, may be appropriate for driving over the speed limit yet we tend not to think that a fine would also be appropriate in the case of murder.

Returning to the terminally ill benefactor, the idea of reciprocal justice can do more to explain why we might think that we should show gratitude to our benefactor *even if* he is going to die tomorrow. First, we have reason to believe that the terminally ill benefactor deserves acknowledgement for providing the benefit. The state of the benefactor's health should not reduce our duty to express gratitude to him. While he is alive, he still has Kantian humanity which means we still have an obligation to provide him with the respect he deserves.

On the consequentialist view, it may be justified to not show gratitude to the terminally ill benefactor if the pleasure you received from the gift exceeds the unhappiness your ingratitude

will cause your benefactor for the next twenty-four hours. But according to reciprocal justice, this cannot be right because the more pleasure received from the gift, the more gratitude is owed. Failure to express gratitude at all in this case is wrong if for no other reason than it fails the proportionality test.

Using punishment as an analog to gratitude provides us with some insight into why gratitude is good. The consequentialist justification of punishment suggests that gratitude is good insofar as it tends to produce good consequences. While this is true, it is not the whole story as illustrated by the terminally ill benefactor case. The reciprocal justice explanation of gratitude is able to fill in some of the gaps that were left empty by consequentialism. Reciprocal justice helps explain gratitude as a way of showing respect for the benefactor. Together these two justifications of gratitude provide a more robust explanation of why gratitude is good and worth pursuing.

One significant disanalogy between punishment and gratitude when it comes to relationships is that we might think that the inverse of gratitude is revenge. Gratitude is a kindness directed to a benefactor in response to the benefactor's kindness done to you. Punishment, we might worry, does not quite have this structure. We direct our punishment toward someone who has done us wrong but then at least one of the following things might happen: (1) the wronged person will forgive the wrongdoer or (2) the wrongdoer will apologize to the wronged person. This structure does not neatly map on to the structure we use to understand gratitude. Revenge seems to be the analogous response that tracks the same structure as gratitude. Revenge is directed to the wrongdoer in response to some wrong done to you. Your aim in committing revenge is to inflict the same kind of damage done to you on the wrongdoer. If we think of gratitude as a return of good for good, revenge is a return of evil for evil.

While this is certainly a strong objection to the analogy between gratitude and punishment that I am putting forward, I do not know that the objection is entirely fatal. Drawing the analogy between gratitude and punishment illuminates some interesting ways in which we can, and sometimes do, justify gratitude. The fact that it is not a perfect analogy does not detract from those interesting insights.

Drawing this analogy to punishment is not, however, a complete justification of gratitude because the same sorts of puzzles that arise for punishment arise for gratitude as well. For instance, in the case of retributive punishment, we might wonder why evil should be met with evil at all. Someone might think that we should meet evil with kindness or that we ought to “turn the other cheek”. For someone who holds such a view, it is unclear why meeting evil with evil would be justified. Analogously, in the case of gratitude, we might wonder why good should be met with good. My goal in this chapter was not to establish which justification of punishment or gratitude is correct. Rather, my goal was to work from the assumption that punishment is clearly justified and to work through possible explanations for why that is. However we resolve those debates about the justification of punishment, we can apply what we learn to justifying gratitude as well.

Conclusion

This dissertation was meant to be an exploration into the nature of gratitude. Since gratitude is something that we all have some experience with—either on the giving or receiving end—I think it is important to get clear about what we are doing when we show gratitude and why we are doing it. In Chapter 2 we traced the ways in which the historical views of gratitude

has evolved. This gave us the foundation to understand the contemporary debates about whether gratitude is a virtue or a duty.

In Chapter 3, I introduced some distinctions between gratitude, thankfulness, and appreciation. These distinctions helped us to get clear about what, exactly, we are talking about in a dissertation about gratitude and which questions should be left to the side. In Chapter 4 I laid out my view of gratitude. The content of the virtue of gratitude is made up of principles. These principles are action guiding in that they provide the shape of the virtue and open up some courses of action and close off other options. These principles, however, are only one part of the virtue. In addition to acting on the principles, we are aiming for an idea of gratitude. This ideal involves acting on the principles but doing so in the right way, with the right motivations, and with the right feelings of gratitude.

In Chapter 5 we explored when gratitude is owed. Since gratitude is not the appropriate response merely for receiving a benefit, we needed to explore when gratitude is appropriate. In Chapter 6, we put the tools introduced in Chapters 4 and 5 into use by applying them to a case of egg donation between sisters. The tools we have help to explain why a check is a less than ideal way of expressing gratitude in such case. Finally in Chapter 7 we explored a novel way of justifying gratitude by drawing an analogy between gratitude and punishment. We found that we can use the same arguments used to justify punishment to make analogous arguments justifying gratitude.

Paths of Future Research

The literature on gratitude remains quite small which means that potential avenues of future inquiry are quite open. One obvious avenue for future research would be to hone my

arguments from Chapter 4. Chapter 4, as it stands, provides a brief sketch of what such a view might look like. There is much more to be said about the principles of gratitude, for instance. I am sure there are other principles of gratitude, both positive and negative, that could be enumerated. There may be some principles of gratitude that stem from the virtue of humility, for instance. It seems clear that humility plays an important role in gratitude. Accepting the benevolence of others requires acknowledging that we cannot do everything on our own. Acknowledging that we need help from others is a sign of humility. Those who refuse the help of others despite being in need of help or who resent their benefactor for providing help when they needed it, we might think, show at best a lack of gratitude and at worst, ingratitude. Principles stemming from humility might help us explain this. This is just one example of other principles that may need to be added in the future. I am sure there are others as well.

There is also more to say about how the role and function of the principles. As it stands in Chapter 4, someone might wonder how my view is more action guiding than Husthouse's V-Rules or how my view capture more of our intuitions of gratitude than Card's trustee paradigm. More needs to be said in the future about how these principles are meant to guide action in a meaningful way without devolving into a view like Card's.

Apart from the ways in which I might hone the arguments from Chapter 4, there are other avenues of exploration into the nature of gratitude that I did not have the time or space to go into here. For now there are three main questions that I am eager to take up: (1) the role of manners or etiquette in understanding the nature of gratitude (2) gratitude to animals and dead people and (3) gratitude to God.

It is not at all obvious that gratitude is only due in response to supererogatory actions, as I suggested in Chapter 5. Some people have strong intuitions that gratitude is due to those who are

merely doing their duty. When we say, “Thank You” to the barista who pours our coffee, that, they say, is an instance of gratitude. I am open to the idea that this is an instance of gratitude but before I jump on board, I want to entertain the idea that we do this out of social convention or as a way of being polite. It may turn out that gratitude from social convention is a form of gratitude, but it may also turn out to be a related, yet distinct, concept similar to the distinction between gratitude and thankfulness. Identifying how actions from duty are related to gratitude will help us to further clarify what we are talking about when we talk about gratitude.

Whether we owe gratitude to animals or people who have died is an interesting question that so far no one has taken up or even considered. Considering animals is important because it can help us clarify how much intentionality is required in order for gratitude to be an appropriate response. Suppose it is appropriate to show gratitude to animals. Must the animal have acted benevolently, or is that too high a bar? Does it make a difference whether the animal was acting on instinct? Does this match our intuitions about humans acting from instinct? Thinking about animals may help us get closer to pinpointing the level of benevolence required for gratitude to be an appropriate response.

Finally, I am interested in thinking about what it means to be grateful to God. Recent thinking about Christian gratitude, in particular, has failed to make the distinction between gratitude and thankfulness.⁸ Without such a distinction, our thinking about gratitude to God becomes confused. The distinction I made in Chapter 3 was the result of an intuitive distinction we feel between being thankful for something (like a sunrise) and being grateful to someone for

⁸ Bass, *Grateful*.

something (like you driving me to work when my car broke down). When we do not make this distinction, it is unclear what being grateful to God amounts to.

The gratitude/thankfulness distinction raises its own problems, however, when it comes to God. For instance, it seems as if we can make any statement of thankfulness one of gratitude by introducing God. I am grateful to God for creating this sunrise, for example. Does this mean the gratitude/thankfulness distinction is flawed? Is God the kind of benefactor who can function outside of the thankfulness/gratitude distinction? Does this mean I ought to be grateful to God for anything I can express using this three-part structure: I am grateful to God for the grass (or ants, or the ocean, or the sky, or my life, or my family, etc)?

One puzzle the question that gratitude to God poses is how does one express gratitude to a benefactor who is not physical. Usually when a benefactor does something for you, you can turn around and direct your gratitude back to him. With God, however, it is not clear where one should direct his or her gratitude. Do we show gratitude by praying, through worship, by doing nothing, by paying it forward, or something else. There is no obvious answer to this question.

These are but a handful of the questions that arise when thinking about gratitude to God. The Christian literature could benefit from some of these philosophical distinctions. It will help to articulate what, exactly, we are trying to figure out about the nature of God and his gifts because these distinctions help us to narrow down more specific questions we are curious about.

This is an exciting time to be thinking about gratitude. The literature is still quite small and so there is plenty left to be uncovered about the nature of gratitude. This dissertation was a first step into pushing the discussion forward but there are plenty of other avenues to explore in the future.

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Vita

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