

7 Parent of the Virtues?

The Prosocial Contours of Gratitude

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Although gratitude is certainly not the most salient or most frequently experienced emotion in the human emotional repertoire, many people do experience gratitude with some frequency. Sommers and Kosmitzki (1988) reported that in a sample of 105 U.S. and 40 German adults, approximately 10% and 30%, respectively indicated that they experienced the emotion of gratitude “regularly and often.” Moreover, approximately 20% of the Americans and 50% of the Germans rated gratitude as a useful and constructive emotion. One area of life in which gratitude might be particularly useful and relevant is the moral realm.

GRATITUDE AS A MORAL EMOTION IN PREVIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIZING

Beginning with Cicero (1851), who called gratitude “not only the greatest, but also the parent of all the other virtues” (p. 139), many students of human emotion have recognized that grateful feelings have unique and important functions in the moral and prosocial realm. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1790/1976), Adam Smith proposed that gratitude is one of the primary motivators of benevolent behavior toward a benefactor (see Harpham, chap. 2, this volume, for a review). Smith wrote, “The sentiment which most immediately and directly prompts us to reward, is gratitude” (1790/1976, p.

68). When a benefactor has acted in such a way as to promote the well-being of a beneficiary, gratitude prompts the beneficiary to find ways to acknowledge the gift. Smith proposed that feelings of gratitude are crucial for maintaining a society that is to be based on goodwill. Of course, Smith was well aware that society could function without an economy of gratitude, but he seemed to believe that grateful societies were more attractive than societies of pure utility. In this sense, Smith seemed to consider gratitude to be an important emotional resource for promoting civility and social stability. Smith posited that three psychological factors govern most experiences and expressions of gratitude. Beneficiaries are most likely to feel and express gratitude toward benefactors who (a) intend to benefit them, (b) succeed in benefiting them, and (c) are capable of sympathizing with the beneficiary's grateful feelings.

Emotion theorists in the second half of the twentieth century elaborated on Smith's (1790/1976) theorizing. Simmel (1908/1950) and Gouldner (1960) conceptualized gratitude as a force for helping people maintain their reciprocity obligations. Schwartz (1967) likened gratitude to *inertia*: a force that causes social relationships to maintain a prosocial orientation (just as grudges and resentments help to maintain a negative orientation in relationships that have been troubled by interpersonal transgressions). Trivers (1971), in keeping with the functionalist interpretations of Smith, Simmel, Gouldner, and Schwartz, speculated about the evolutionary functions of gratitude. Trivers viewed gratitude as an evolutionary adaptation that regulates people's responses to altruistic acts. Trivers held that grateful emotions are especially sensitive to the cost/benefit ratio of altruistic acts, with relatively costly benefits eliciting more gratitude.

Cognitive-emotion theorists refined these insights about gratitude by emphasizing the role of cognition in eliciting emotions such as gratitude. For example, Heider (1958) argued that people feel grateful when they have received a benefit from someone who, they believe, *intended* to benefit them. Heider, like Smith, posited that the perceived intentionality of the benefit was the most important factor in determining whether someone felt grateful after receiving a benefit. Other cognitive-emotion theorists such as Weiner (1985); Ortony, Clore, and Collins (1987); and Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) also recognized the moral quality of gratitude. Lazarus and Lazarus, for example, posited that gratitude is one of the "empathic emotions" that are grounded in the human capacity for empathizing with other people. A central aspect of Lazarus and Lazarus's theory is the notion that each emotion is associated with a distinctive dramatic plot or "core relational theme" that helps people to interpret the events that happen to them and to assess their relevance for personal well-being. The core relational theme associated with

gratitude is the appreciation of a beneficial, altruistic gift. According to Lazarus and Lazarus, people experience this core relational theme when they empathize with the benefactor's expenditure of effort on the beneficiary's behalf.

GRATITUDE AS A MORAL AFFECT: A FUNCTIONAL MODEL

We concur with previous gratitude researchers in positing that gratitude is a moral and prosocial emotion. In a recent article (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001), we expanded on the prosocial nature of gratitude, detailing three specific prosocial or moral functions that gratitude serves. Namely, the emotion of gratitude functions as a *moral barometer*, a *moral motive*, and (when people express their grateful emotions in words or actions) a *moral reinforcer*. Furthermore, we hypothesized that, because gratitude is so closely tied to moral and prosocial behaviors, personality differences in gratitude would be positively associated with traits that facilitate interpersonal relations, and negatively associated with traits that interfere with maintaining stable, positive relationships (see Roberts, chap. 4, this volume, for details on the distinction between emotional and dispositional gratitude). In this chapter, we elaborate on each of these hypotheses and briefly describe the strength of supporting research evidence.

The Moral Barometer Function of Gratitude

As noted, we have hypothesized that grateful emotions work in the same fashion as does a barometer. A barometer is an instrument that indicates a change in atmospheric conditions, namely, barometric pressure. When the weather changes, the readings on a barometer reflect this change. Previous theorists and researchers have delineated the informational function of affect and emotions (Batson, Turk, Shaw, & Klein, 1995; Epstein, 1984; Schwarz, 1990). Gratitude fills a similar informational function by indicating a certain a particular type of interpersonal transaction—one in which a benefactor contributes to a beneficiary's perceived well-being through some tangible or intangible benefit.

As a moral barometer, gratitude is dependent on social-cognitive input. We posited, as have most other theorists, that people are most likely to feel grateful when (a) they have received a particularly valuable benefit, (b) high effort and cost have been expended on their behalf, (c) the expenditure of ef-

fort on their behalf seems to have been intentional rather than accidental, and (d) the expenditure of effort on their behalf was gratuitous (i.e., was not determined by the existence of a role-based relationship between benefactor and beneficiary).

In our review, we concluded that the existing research supports the moral barometer hypothesis quite strongly (Graham & Barker, 1990; Graham, Hudley, & Williams, 1992; Hegtvedt, 1990; Lane & Anderson, 1976; Okamoto, 1992; Okamoto & Robinson, 1997; Overwalle, Mervielde, & De Schuyter, 1995; Tesser, Gatewood, & Driver, 1968; Weiner, Russell, & Lerman, 1979; Zaleski, 1988). Results of one of the earliest studies of the cognitive determinants of gratitude are typical of the sort of evidence that we found for the moral barometer hypothesis. Tesser et al. (1968) studied 126 male and female participants who had read three scenarios in which intentionality, cost, and value of a benefit were systematically manipulated across subjects. Respondents were asked to consider how much gratitude the beneficiary would likely experience under each combination of levels of intentionality, cost, and value. Tesser and his associates found main effects for intentionality, cost, and value: Respondents indicated that they would feel most grateful for a benefit that was (a) rendered intentionally, (b) costly to the benefactor, and (c) valuable to the recipient. Across three different scenarios, the linear combination of these three factors predicted 72% to 85% of the variance in respondents' expectations for the amount of gratitude that they might feel following the receipt of a benefit. Several other studies using both fictional scenarios and autobiographical accounts of gratitude experiences also found that people were most grateful in similar situations, the prototype of which is a situation in which another person intentionally rendered a valuable or costly benefit, or a benefit that was both valuable and costly.

Although people might be motivated by a variety of factors to make public, behavioral expressions of gratitude (grateful emotions being only one of them), studies using behavioral measures of gratitude show that expressions of gratitude and grateful emotions are caused by similar interpersonal factors (Okamoto, 1992; Okamoto & Robinson, 1997). For example, Okamoto and Robinson staged an experiment in which a confederate held the door for another student as they both passed through a doorway. The investigators varied the amount of effort that the confederate expended by varying whether the confederate was coming in or going out of the same door that the participant was entering and whether the confederate allowed the participant to enter the door before the confederate. People were most likely to express gratitude when the imposition on the confederate was highest. The expressions of gratitude also became substantially more formal (i.e., po-

lite) as the level of imposition on the benefactor increased. Thus, the more effort the benefactor appeared to expend on the participants' behalf, the more grateful the participants acted toward the benefactor.

People apparently also experience more gratitude toward benefactors from whom they would not expect benevolence. This finding supports the moral barometer hypothesis function of gratitude because unexpected benevolence probably leads to the attribution that the benevolent action was rendered intentionally. We found evidence for the unexpected benevolence effect in research showing that people experience less gratitude for benefits rendered by someone who is close to them than by someone who is less close to them (Bar-Tal, Bar-Zohar, Greenberg, & Hermon, 1977), and by someone who has more social status and power than they do than by someone who has equal social status and power (Becker & Smenner, 1986; Hegtvedt, 1990; Okamoto & Robinson, 1997).

Our review of the literature also uncovered research that we could not reconcile easily with the moral barometer hypothesis—at least initially. The first challenge was to reconcile the moral barometer hypothesis with research showing that people sometimes experience gratitude in response to good fortune that is not due to the action of other human beings (Graham & Barker, 1990; Moore, 1996; Roseman, 1991; Teigen, 1997; Veisson, 1999; Weiner, Russell, & Lerman, 1979), such as when they achieve good outcomes due to their own effort, God, luck, or chance. To whom is one grateful in these circumstances?

We concluded that perhaps in such cases, people attribute intentionality to nonhuman agents (e.g., God, luck, etc.). If one believes that God, fortune, or luck might have been responsible for a positive outcome, it might be because they attribute causal power to such nonhuman agents. We also considered the possibility that people who claim to experience gratitude in situations in which nonmoral agents are involved (i.e., actors who are not capable of behaving morally) or when they themselves are responsible for the positive outcome actually experience relief, gladness, happiness, or some other pleasant affect but are mislabeling their affective state as gratitude. A third possibility is that experiences that elicit attribution-independent emotions such as happiness and relief activate other positive feelings, including attribution-dependent emotions such as gratitude or pride.

Another empirical challenge to the moral barometer hypothesis was research indicating that perceiving oneself to have received an intentionally rendered, valuable benefit does not necessarily lead to gratitude among young children. We concluded that children come to understand gratitude over the course of several years of development (Baumgartner-Tramer, 1938; Gleason & Weintraub, 1976; Graham, 1988; P. L. Harris, Olthof,

Meerum Terwogt, & Hardman, 1987; Preyer, 1933; Russell & Paris, 1994; Sowa, 1981), and that gratitude does not function reliably as a moral barometer until middle childhood. Such developmental considerations notwithstanding, we concluded that the empirical evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that gratitude is a moral barometer—an emotional response to having received benefits from a person who rendered such benefits intentionally.

The Moral Motive Function of Gratitude

Gratitude may have a second moral function: It may motivate grateful people to behave morally or prosocially themselves. Specifically, we hypothesized that people made grateful by the actions of a benefactor are more likely to contribute to the welfare of the benefactor—or even a third party—in the future. Moreover, we hypothesized that a person who experiences gratitude as the result of a benefactor's prosocial actions is also more likely to inhibit motivations to act destructively toward the benefactor or a third party.

Two studies (Peterson & Stewart, 1996; Graham, 1988) were relevant to the idea that people who have been made grateful by a benefit are more likely to behave prosocially toward the benefactor or other people in ensuing interactions, and both supported the hypothesis (although the evidence was rather indirect). Additionally, research by de Waal on reciprocity in primates demonstrated that chimpanzees (de Waal, 1997) and capuchin monkeys (de Waal & Berger, 2000) behave prosocially toward individuals who have previously provided them a benefit (see also Bonnie & de Waal, chap. 11, this volume). We found only one study (Baron, 1984) that addressed the idea that feeling grateful inhibits people from engaging in destructive interpersonal behavior. Again, this study was supportive of the moral motive hypothesis, but the evidence was indirect at best.

What was most striking to us was how very little research had addressed the moral motive hypothesis, despite its seeming obviousness. Research on reactions to aid and reciprocity—which seem relevant to the motivational value of gratitude—apparently has been dominated by the assumption that the key motive for moral behavior in reciprocity situations is inequity or indebtedness (see Greenberg & Westcott, 1983; Shapiro, 1984). Studies that would permit researchers to examine whether the link between receiving a benefit from a benefactor and the beneficiary's reciprocal behavior is mediated by the beneficiary's gratitude would be particularly valuable. Also, differentiating the unique effects of gratitude as a moral motive from the general effects of positive mood on helping behavior (Carlson, Charlin, & Miller, 1988) would be informative.

The Moral Reinforcer Function of Gratitude Expressions

The third hypothesis proceeding from the moral affect model of gratitude is that expressions of gratitude can reinforce moral behavior. Qualitative researchers have noted that expressions of gratitude can reinforce benevolent actions (Bennett, Ross, & Sunderland, 1996; Bernstein & Simmons, 1974). Conversely, people evaluate ungrateful individuals quite unfavorably (Stein, 1989), and therefore may be less inclined to help ungrateful people in the future.

Experimental data show that benefactors who are thanked for their efforts in rendering benefits to a beneficiary are willing to give more and work harder on behalf of others than are benefactors who have not been thanked for their prior efforts. R. D. Clark (1975); Goldman, Seever, and Seever (1982); and Moss and Page (1972) all found that adults who were thanked for giving a confederate directions were much more likely to help another confederate in the near future—a person who dropped his or her books in the street, for instance—than were benefactors who were rebuked for giving help to the first confederate (but see M. B. Harris, 1972, for a failure to replicate). Also, participants who were thanked for accepting electric shocks for a confederate continued to receive shocks for the confederate at a higher rate than were subjects who were not thanked initially (McGovern, Ditzian, & Taylor, 1975).

Applied researchers also have found that expressions of gratitude can reinforce moral behavior. H. B. Clark, Northrop, and Barkshire (1988) attempted to increase the frequency with which case managers visited their adolescent clients in a residential treatment program. During a 20-week baseline observation period, 43% of the adolescents were visited weekly by their case managers. After the observation period, the residential units began to send thank-you letters to case managers after they visited their clients. During the 20-week period during which the residential units sent thank-you notes, nearly 80% of clients were visited by their case managers each week. During a 10-week reversal period (during which no thank-you letters were sent following visits), the rates of weekly visitation dropped back to roughly their initial levels (i.e., approximately 50% of clients were visited weekly).

Other field experiments indicate that the reinforcement effects of gratitude expressions extend into the economic arena. Restaurant bills on which the server writes "thank you" produce tips that are as much as 11% higher (Rind & Bordia, 1995) than do bills without expressions of gratitude. Also, including thank-you notes in mail surveys typically increases response rates (Maheux, Legault, & Lambert, 1989). In addition, some evidence suggests that people who are high in need for approval may be especially prone to be-

have in such prosocial fashions when reinforced for moral or prosocial actions they have already enacted (Deutsch & Lamberti, 1986).

Thus, we found substantial support for the moral reinforcer hypothesis. People who have been the recipients of sincere expressions of gratitude are more likely to act again in a prosocial fashion toward their beneficiaries. Also, people are more likely to behave prosocially toward third parties after having received sincere thanks from someone on whom they have already conferred a benefit. The effects of gratitude as a moral reinforcer, of course, would not have surprised early theorists such as Adam Smith (1790/1976) and twentieth-century theorists such as Georg Simmel (1908/1950). They believed that experiencing and expressing gratitude were crucial for positive human relations. Conceptualizing gratitude as an emotion that strengthens people's social resources is also consistent with recent formulations of the functions of positive emotions in general (Fredrickson, 1998).

Gratitude and Prosocially Relevant Personality Traits

The fourth hypothesis related to the moral affect theory is that gratitude is related to personality variables that are linked with prosocial emotion and behavior. This hypothesis is supported by three relevant studies. First, Saucier and Goldberg (1998) reported that the Big Five personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) accounted for approximately 16% of the variability in a measure of gratitude consisting of adjectives including *grateful* and *thankful* ($R = .40$). People who rated themselves (or others) as particularly grateful also rated themselves (or those whom they were rating) as higher in agreeableness ($r = .31$). Agreeableness is actually a higher order personality factor that subsumes a variety of prosocial traits such as empathy, trust, and willingness to forgive. People who are rated high in agreeableness tend to do well in social relationships, and their relationships are characterized by less conflict and greater adjustment (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996). It is of interest that gratefulness ratings also were correlated negatively ($r = -.24$) with openness. The correlations with the other Big Five constructs (conscientiousness, extraversion, and neuroticism) were nearly zero.

Gratitude appears also to be inversely related to narcissism, which is a higher order construct subsuming traits such as grandiosity, entitlement, selfishness, and denigration of others. Farwell and Wohlwend-Lloyd (1998) examined the association of gratitude and narcissism—as measured with Raskin and Hall's (1979) Narcissistic Personality Inventory—in the context of a laboratory-based interdependence game. Participants completed a bogus

assessment of creativity. Participants were told that their performance on the creativity test would be combined with the score of a randomly assigned partner and that the resulting aggregate performance would be compared with the scores of other randomly assembled pairs of participants. After completing the bogus creativity task, participants completed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. Then the experimenter ostensibly scored each participant's performance on the creativity task and aggregated it with data from another respondent. The experimenter then told each participant that his or her dyad had scored better than 85% of the other dyads, and that his or her performance differed from the performance of his or her partner.

Then participants completed several measures of their feelings regarding their own performance ("happy," "proud," and "competent") and two measures of their feelings regarding their partners ("liking" and "gratitude"). These latter two measures were combined into a single index. Narcissism was inversely related to scores on this two-item measure of liking and gratitude toward the partner, $r(54) = -.23, p < .05$, suggesting that narcissistic people may experience less gratitude for the actions of their relationship partners than do less narcissistic individuals.

McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002) developed a measure of dispositional gratitude, the GQ-6. They found that the grateful personality was related to a number of different interpersonal traits and behaviors. In both college-student and nonstudent samples, the GQ-6 was positively correlated with self-reported forgiveness, as well as with peer reports of participants' prosocial traits and behaviors. In contrast, the GQ-6 was negatively correlated with envy. Additionally, multiple regression analyses showed that agreeableness predicted unique variance in both self- and peer-ratings of the GQ-6.

The scant data therefore indicate that individual differences in gratitude are related to individual differences in personality factors that have typically been linked to prosocial emotions and behavior, namely, high agreeableness and forgiveness, as well as low narcissism and envy. Further research on the personality correlates of gratitude will help to uncover the prosocial traits of the grateful individual.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THE MORAL AFFECT MODEL OF GRATITUDE

Our review of the existing literature led us to conclude that gratitude does indeed possess moral or prosocial qualities. As a moral barometer, gratitude indicates that someone has been the recipient of another person's benevo-

lence. As a moral motive, gratitude prompts a beneficiary to find ways to behave prosocially toward his or her benefactor, or toward others. As a moral reinforcer, expressions of gratitude cause benefactors to persist in behaving in a benevolent fashion toward other people. Finally, gratitude appears to be linked to traits such as agreeableness, prosociality, narcissism, and envy, which have been identified as having distinctly moral or prosocial features. However, the moral affect model of gratitude raises questions about the very nature of gratitude that might be worth elaborating or clarifying.

Moral, Prosocial, or Both?

One of the first questions regarding our conceptualization of gratitude as a moral affect relates to our use of the term *moral*. Clearly, people feel grateful when they perceive that another person has intentionally acted in a way to improve their well-being, but one might question whether such situations necessarily have anything to do with morality. As discussed in our previous article (McCullough et al., 2001), some situations that might involve gratitude may seem amoral—or actually *immoral*—from an outsider's perspective. The world of organized crime teems with excellent examples of such situations.

Consider, for example, a merchant who sells illegal firearms to underworld figures. He or she might be grateful for a new customer's business, which presumably would contribute to the merchant's well-being, even though shopping in a particular store versus any other store (or no store at all) probably would not be judged as having much moral valence in an absolute sense (e.g., by an impartial perceiver). Moreover, because the merchant is selling illegal firearms to a criminal, an impartial perceiver probably would conclude that the net effects of the transaction are positively *immoral*. Such judgments of absolute nonmorality or immorality, however, would not change the fact that from the merchant's local perspective, the purchaser's actions rendered a benefit to and promoted the well-being of the merchant. Moreover, depending on the supply of illegal firearms, the number of competitors, and the amount of effort the purchaser expended to purchase the gun, the transaction could possess many of the social-cognitive characteristics that would lead the merchant to feel grateful for the purchaser's business.

Consider also a situation in which a wealthy and powerful crime boss helps a hardworking but financially inept employee avoid family stress and public humiliation by helping the employee out of a serious financial strain. Obviously, the employee would feel extremely grateful to the boss. As a result, when the crime boss asks the employee return the favor by killing an

enemy, the employee is more inclined to say yes due to the gratitude experienced for the boss's generosity during his or her time of need. Clearly, in such a situation, gratitude would not be motivating moral behavior, but rather, patently *immoral* behavior, even though the behavior (killing the boss's enemy) is perceived by both parties as benefiting the boss's well-being.

Local and absolute morality. In an earlier article (McCullough et al., 2001), we dispatched with the objection that gratitude does not function as a moral affect in such instances by arguing that gratitude can be a response to *perceived* morality, even if the net effects of that benefit do not comport well with perceivers' prototypes or trained ethicists' judgments of what is moral. We distinguished between *local* and *absolute* perceptions of morality. Thus, we posited that the prototypical social events that elicit gratitude are at least moral in a local sense (the beneficiary perceives himself or herself to have been benefited), even if the benefactor's behavior—or the actions motivated by gratitude—were not moral in an absolute sense.

Gratitude and moral rationalization. We might clarify the contrast between local and absolute morality by referring to the literature on moral rationalization. It is possible that people whose gratitude either derives from or results in immoral behavior engage in one or more processes of moral rationalization that allow them to perceive their benefactors' (or their own) immoral actions as consistent with moral principles. Because people have a need to see themselves as good and moral (e.g., Aronson, 1969; Steele, 1988), they are reluctant to admit that their immoral behavior is in violation of moral principles. Instead, they use mechanisms such as motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990) to convince themselves that their behavior—or the behavior of their benefactors—is, in fact, moral (Tsang, 2002). In the previous example, although an outside person might judge the murder of the crime boss's enemy as immoral, the grateful employee who committed the murder may have used moral rationalization to convince himself or herself of the morality of that action.

Bandura (1990) outlined a theory of moral disengagement that described several rationalization techniques people might use to deactivate their internalized moral self-sanctions, allowing them to act immorally without realizing that their actions violate their moral principles. Methods of moral disengagement include (a) reconstruing conduct (whereby an individual transforms immoral actions into moral ones, for example by pointing to a higher cause), (b) obscuring personal agency (whereby an individual might claim that he or she was simply a cog in a larger machine), (c) disregarding negative consequences (whereby an individual selectively avoids the consequences of immoral behavior), and (d) blaming and dehumanizing victims.

Because maintaining a positive self-concept is so psychologically important, both underworld figures in our examples might engage in different methods of moral rationalization that allow them to avoid viewing themselves as willing participants in an immoral activity. For the merchant, perhaps, selling illegal firearms is not immoral because he or she believes the legal system is unfair, or that the cause for which the weapons will be used is a just one. Although bystanders might believe that the sale of illegal firearms, for instance, is immoral, the seller and the buyer of the weapons might not.

Furthermore, it is possible that the gratitude that these underworld figures experience in such situations actually does stimulate the desire to uphold moral principles—the very principles that have formed the basis for much of the Western understanding of morality. The moral principles most relevant to gratitude are reciprocity and equity. Reciprocity is the principle of helping others who help us (Gouldner, 1960; Wilke & Lanzetta, 1982). The related principle of equity is upheld when all participants in a relationship are perceived as receiving equal outcomes relative to their input (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973). From this point of view, killing the crime boss's enemy is perceived as moral because the henchman allows one moral principle (e.g., equity or reciprocity) to take precedence over another moral principle (e.g., it is wrong to kill people). As a result, the gratitude that these characters experience might be linked to behaviors (their benefactors' or their own) that they perceive to be moral.

Situations in which gratitude results from or leads to immoral behavior does some violence to the moral affect model of gratitude. At the very least, these situations lead to the qualification that some causes and effects of gratitude, although perhaps "prosocial" in nature, are amoral or even immoral. For this reason, it may add clarity to speak of gratitude as a prosocial affect rather than as a moral one. On the other hand, the organized crime examples that we have discussed illustrate that people who experience gratitude can come to perceive immoral actions as being moral, and perhaps the power of gratitude to shape moral judgment and behavior is a topic worthy of study in its own right.

What Are the Appropriate Levels of Analysis for Studying Gratitude?

A second question related to the moral affect theory of gratitude concerns the various levels at which gratitude might be analyzed and studied empirically. One can imagine at least three levels of analysis from which gratitude might be quantified: (a) the dispositional perspective, (b) the benefactor perspective, and (c) the benefit perspective.

The dispositional perspective is the most general perspective from which one might attempt to classify persons. Laypersons use this level of analysis each time they refer to a person as grateful or ungrateful—labels that ostensibly refer to a person's general tendencies to be grateful or ungrateful across a variety of life experiences, benefits, and beneficiaries. An example of measuring gratitude from the dispositional perspective is the study by Saucier and Goldberg (1998), which used a two-item measure of gratitude (consisting of the adjectives *grateful* and *thankful*) to examine the Big Five correlates of gratitude, or our own work on the GQ-6 (McCullough et al., 2002).

From a benefactor perspective, gratitude is understood by observing people's degrees of gratitude for particular persons who have conferred benefits to them in the past. For example, people are typically expected to be grateful to their parents independently of an exhaustive tally of the benefits that their parents have conferred on them. The exact nature of the benefits received in the past is not the main focus. Rather, from a benefactor perspective, the main question is whether (and the degree to which) a person feels grateful *to someone*.

From the benefit perspective, one is interested in the degree of gratitude that a person feels in response to a particular benefit (e.g., paying one's college tuition, allowing one to merge into traffic, taking out the trash) that a particular benefactor (e.g., a father, a stranger on the highway, a roommate) has bestowed. Thus, the question from the benefit perspective is whether a person is grateful *to someone for something*. The benefit perspective is exemplified in the work of Graham (1988) who examined the cognitive factors that shaped whether a child would feel grateful toward another child who chose him or her to be on a sports team.

In this early stage of empirical work on gratitude, it might be useful to remain mindful of these obvious and seemingly trivial distinctions between the various perspectives from which gratitude might be conceptualized and measured. One reason these distinctions might be important is because phenomena related to gratitude at one level of analysis might not emerge at other levels of analysis.

An analogy from research on forgiveness might help to clarify this point, because forgiveness also can be measured at several levels (McCullough, Hoyt, & Rachal, 2000). McCullough et al. (2000) distinguished between forgiveness as measured at the dispositional level (i.e., a person's general tendency to forgive most persons across most transgressions), the relationship-specific level (i.e., a person's general tendency to forgive a single person across most transgressions), and the offense-specific level (i.e., a person's general tendency to forgive a single person for a specific transgression). McCullough and Witvliet (2001) also distinguished between forgiveness as a re-

sponse to an isolated transgression, a personality disposition, and a characteristic of social units. We have found that the extent to which a person experiences empathy for a particular transgressor is strongly related (e.g., r ranging from .50 to .80) to the extent to which the person reports having forgiven the transgressor (McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). This robust correlation is consistent with theorizing that empathy for one's transgressor causes people to forgive (McCullough et al., 1997). However, researchers have found that measures of the propensity to forgive (analogous to the dispositional perspective outlined earlier) are correlated fairly trivially with measures of empathic disposition (i.e., $r < .20$; Tangney, Fee, Reinsmith, Boone, & Lee, 1999).

Another situation that raises awareness of the importance of being specific about the levels of analysis at which gratitude-related phenomena take place is the fact that associations that occur between two variables measured at the same level of analysis might not be obtained when variables are measured at different levels of analysis. Another example from forgiveness research illustrates this point. Snyder, Yamhure, and Heinze (2000) reported that measures of dispositional hope and dispositional forgiveness were moderately correlated, but Sandage, Worthington, and Calvert-Minor (2000) found that hope (measured at the dispositional level of analysis) was not correlated with people's self-reported forgiveness for a specific transgressor. Careful theorizing that takes into account these various levels of analysis will help researchers on the moral and prosocial contours of gratitude to progress more efficiently in developing and testing theory.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps beginning with Cicero, who called gratitude "the parent of the virtues," scholars in the humanities have associated gratitude with morality and prosocial behavior. The limited amount of social scientific research on gratitude that has accumulated over the last century demonstrates these assertions to be generally accurate, with some qualifications. To the extent that gratitude causes us to stop and ponder the benevolence of other people, and to the extent to which gratitude actually motivates people to behave prosocially, gratitude might be thought of as a social resource that is well worth understanding—and perhaps even cultivating—for the development of a society based on goodwill.

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