The Concept of Gratitude in Philosophy and Psychology: An Update

Liz Gulliford[a] and Blaire Morgan[b]

Addresses: [a] Dr Liz Gulliford
Centre for Psychology and Social Sciences, Faculty of Health, Education and Society, University of Northampton, University Drive, Northampton NN1 5PH, UK

[b] Dr Blaire Morgan
School of Psychology, University of Worcester, Worcester WR2 6AJ, UK

T: +44 1604 892388 (Liz Gulliford)
+44 1905 542948 (Blaire Morgan)

E-mails: LizGulliford@northampton.ac.uk
b.morgan@worc.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper surveys interdisciplinary research on gratitude that has been conducted since the review paper translated into German in this issue 'Recent work on the concept of gratitude in philosophy and psychology', was published in the *Journal of Value Inquiry* in 2013. We share progress on our subsequent research, and report on key developments in the field. We revisit familiar themes regarding conditions placed on gratitude, the structure and moral value of gratitude, and the pedagogical implications of research on gratitude, addressing the issue of how the virtue of gratitude should be promoted and taught. As befits a collection dedicated to exploring gratitude's potential 'shadow', we consider again the valence of gratitude and whether it is as quintessentially positive as many have assumed.

Keywords

Conditions placed on gratitude, Cross-cultural studies, Indebtedness, Interdisciplinary research, Pro-sociality, Reciprocity

1. Introduction

The paper 'Recent work on gratitude in philosophy and psychology', which has been translated into German in this special issue, has been cited almost 120 times since its publication in the *Journal of Value Inquiry* in 2013. In this reflective piece, we survey interdisciplinary research on gratitude, examining what has changed in the field since we wrote this paper with Kristján Kristjánsson almost a decade ago. One thing which certainly has *not* changed is the popularity of gratitude in both philosophy and psychology. Researching gratitude has not been a flash in the academic pan and is still in the spotlight in popular culture too, attested by the plethora of magazine articles, gratitude books and journals available on the high street.

The stated aim of the 2013 paper was 'to suggest a way forward for both psychological and philosophical accounts of gratitude – ways out of current impasses' (2013, p. 287). Our review revealed a confusing array of definitions, based explicitly (and often implicitly) on different conceptual conditions placed on gratitude, which we reviewed in turn. Whether it would be possible or desirable to arrive at a single agreed circumscription of gratitude, we brought into sharp relief the conceptual contours of gratitude, enabling comparisons between definitions to be made more easily. The paper delivered on its ambition to move beyond current impasses by stimulating a greater rapprochement between philosophy and psychology, achieved in no small part by reviewing both literatures within a single, interdisciplinary journal article.

In 2013 we had yet to report on studies of laypeople's conceptual understandings of gratitude, though in the years since we have been able to shed light on this empirically. In 2014 we replicated Lambert, Graham and Fincham's (2009) prototype analysis of gratitude in the USA with a UK sample (Morgan, Gulliford & Kristjánsson, 2014), which we subsequently repeated in Australia (Morgan, Gulliford, & Waters, forthcoming). Through these studies we have shown that gratitude is associated with positive and negative features, telling against the

unambiguously positive view of gratitude that has tended to prevail in psychological discourse, upon which we expand below.

Since 2013 we have also tested the conceptual conditions placed on gratitude empirically in both the UK and Australia using a vignette questionnaire (Morgan et al., forthcoming) and created a multi-component measure of gratitude that allows participants' underlying conceptual understandings of gratitude to be tapped alongside grateful feelings, attitudes towards gratitude, and self-reported gratitude-related behaviours (Morgan, Gulliford & Kristjánsson, 2017). Together with sharing progress on our own endeavours, we also report on other key developments in the field since the publication of our interdisciplinary paper. Gratitude continues to be a topic for lively debate and energetic study. We were – and still are – very fortunate to be involved in research on the topic at such a fruitful and formative time.

2. Conditions on Gratitude

Supererogation

The supererogation requirement characterises the position of political philosopher, A. J. Simmons (1979), who asserted that gratitude must always involve a costly sacrifice and is not appropriate if a benefit has been provided by duty-fulfilling or obligation-fulfilling actions. Similarly, in laying out the conceptual conditions of gratitude, moral philosopher Robert C. Roberts (2004) assumed the prerequisite of supererogation: 'In conferring X, S has gone beyond what S owes me' (Roberts, 2004, p. 64).

Our subsequent empirical work, post the 2013 review, has provided robust support for our assertion that placing a supererogation condition on gratitude (such that gratitude *requires* the benefactor go beyond duty to provide a benefit) 'jars with the intuitions of most competent language speakers' (Gulliford, Morgan & Kristjánsson, 2013, p. 302). Data from our vignette questionnaire, in which we operationalised conceptual conditions placed on gratitude

empirically, showed that young people and adults believe gratitude to be warranted when people are benefitted by someone who was simply fulfilling their duties. This finding upholds Terrance McConnell's position that special sacrifice or effort is *not* a necessary condition for gratitude and that people may be grateful to benefactors even if they are discharging the duties of their assigned role (McConnell, 1993).

Robert Roberts referenced our empirical work on gratitude in a subsequent paper, 'The normative and the empirical in the study of gratitude' (Roberts, 2015). In this article, he generously reported that his interaction with our work had substantially advanced his thinking, not only about the empirical study of gratitude, but also about its grammar (Roberts, 2015, p. 24). In this connection, Kristjánsson (2018) understands that Roberts relaxed the aforementioned stance on supererogation in the light of our data, which showed that only 1–2% of people (young or old) subscribe to the view that a proper application of gratitude requires the benefactor to have gone above and beyond the call of duty in creating a benefit for the beneficiary (Gulliford & Morgan, 2016).

What is especially encouraging about Roberts' (2015) paper is that it bears witness to a bridge across the impasse we reported in 2013 in relation to philosophers who 'rarely consider evidence on how terms are actually employed by laypeople' (Gulliford et al., 2013, p. 289). Roberts recognised the contributions of the vignette and prototype analyses of gratitude which tap lay understanding of concepts, though he remained 'non-committal' about whether to prefer a Socratic or prototype understanding of gratitude's conditions (Roberts, 2015, p. 24).

Intentionality

As evident in our 2013 review paper, another conceptual condition that philosophers and psychologists have typically placed on gratitude, is that the benefactor must have *intended* to bestow the benefit. We raised the question, however, whether this intentionality condition is

necessary, or whether good intentions might be better construed as *intensifiers* of gratitude (Gulliford et al., 2013, p. 303). A person could be grateful for a benefit that was rendered without premeditation, accidentally or fortuitously. A distinction can also be drawn between 'strong' and 'weak' forms of intentionality. A benefit could be conferred on a *given* beneficiary (the strong intentionality condition), or at least on some *potential* future beneficiary (weak intentionality condition). For example, one could donate money in order for a particular beneficiary to receive essential surgery (strong intentionality condition), or one could give to a medical charity that enables unspecified individuals to benefit from medical treatment in the future (weak intentionality condition). We questioned whether it might also be possible to be grateful for benefits rendered selfishly (for example, with an ulterior motive) or even for maliciously rendered benefits. In the 2013 paper, we outlined a hypothetical scenario where a distant relative named you as a major beneficiary in her will to harm the relationship between you and your other relatives.

Within our empirical work (Gulliford & Morgan, 2016; Morgan & Gulliford, 2018; Morgan, Gulliford & Waters, forthcoming), we have subsequently shown that while there are naturally individual differences in the degree to which reported gratitude to a benefactor would be reduced by ulterior and malicious motives, people are on average, still grateful for benefits rendered with intentions that were not purely benign, such as being grateful to a colleague who nominated you for an award at work in the clear expectation of your helping them with their workload in return (Gulliford & Morgan, 2016). In addition to demonstrating individual differences operating in terms of conditions placed on gratitude and their concomitant effect on reported gratitude, we have more recently highlighted the role of cultural differences in the appraisal of intentions pertaining to gratitude and in tolerating the mixed emotions associated with it, as we discuss below.

3. The Valence of Gratitude

In our 2013 review paper, we outlined the predominant focus on gratitude as a positive emotion and began to question its 'quintessential' positive nature. This plotted a course for future critical explorations of gratitude, and consideration of its shadow sides. Whilst there remains a principal focus on gratitude's positive psychosocial benefits in the literature, this is now complemented by broader examinations of gratitude in relation to constructs such as guilt, indebtedness and embarrassment.

In an examination of laypeople's considerations of gratitude in the UK, we conducted a prototype analysis of gratitude where adult participants named features of gratitude while simultaneously rating the positive or negative valence of these features (Morgan et al., 2014). Participants named a large range of positively valenced features associated with gratitude, however, also reported negatively valenced features including indebtedness or obligation (named by 29.2% of the 108 participants), guilt (16.7%), embarrassment or awkwardness (6.5%), and ingratitude (5.1%). When compared to an earlier prototype study of gratitude in the US (Lambert et al., 2009), UK participants named negatively valenced features of gratitude with higher frequency, for example, indebtedness and obligation were each named by just 4.4% of the 94 US participants. Moreover, UK participants reported negatively valenced features that had not been considered by the comparative US sample (guilt, embarrassed or awkward, and ingratitude). This study thereby signalled mixed emotions associated with gratitude, alongside possible discrepancies in the prevalence of these mixed emotions across cultures.

Further research has corroborated discrepancies in the gratitude-indebtedness relationship across cultures. For example, Oishi, Koo, Lim and Suh (2019) observed how gratitude writing practices evoked indebtedness in their Korean student participants, but not in American student counterparts. The authors considered this to be linked to the interdependent nature of Korean society, which is characterised by mutual obligation, however, the UK study

above notes high frequencies of indebtedness even in independent societies. In a separate study presented in the same paper, Oishi et al. also compared interpersonal and intrapersonal gratitude (gratitude towards others versus gratitude for one's health), with interpersonal gratitude prompting feelings of both indebtedness and guilt in American student participants.

Indebtedness in response to a benefit or favour has been documented in various studies (e.g., Naito & Sakata, 2010; Naito, Wangwan & Tani, 2005), and gratitude induction studies have been shown to generate feelings of indebtedness (e.g., Layous et al., 2017). As introduced in our 2013 paper, some researchers consider gratitude and indebtedness as intrinsically linked or synonymous (Greenberg, 1980; Tesser, Gatewood & Driver, 1968) while others have made efforts to distinguish between the two, often conceptualising gratitude as a positive emotion and indebtedness as a negative emotion (Algoe, Gable & Maisel, 2010; Watkins, Scheer, Ovnicek & Kolts, 2006). Tsang (2006) noted how differential emotions of gratitude and indebtedness following others' help might be explained through benefactor intentions. More recently, Ting (2017) has postulated that gratitude proceeds indebtedness and, what they term 'internal indebtedness', occurs when the beneficiary is unable to repay the favour bestowed. In line with Tsang (2006), this theoretical position also suggests that whether a favour generates gratitude depends on the benefactor's motives; gratitude can only be experienced when the benefactor has no (ulterior) purpose or expectation of return.

Empirical research does not fully support Ting's theory, however. Through the development and use of vignettes, we have examined self-reports of gratitude in response to benefactor intentions, presence of mixed emotions, cost/effort on behalf of the benefactor and value of the benefit (Gulliford & Morgan, 2016; Morgan & Gulliford, 2018; Morgan et al., forthcoming). Responses to hypothetical vignette scenarios indicate that having an ulterior motive or purpose to benefaction does reduce the degree of gratitude experienced, but does not diminish gratitude entirely (Gulliford & Morgan, 2016). On a scale of 0 – 100%, where 0% =

not at all grateful and 100% = most grateful one could feel, UK adults report an average of 38% gratitude in response to ulterior motives. Similarly, in a separate hypothetical vignette on mixed emotion where gratitude coincides with feelings of indebtedness, self-reported gratitude decreases as compared to no indebtedness, but gratitude is still experienced (67% average degree for indebtedness, versus 73% at a comparable baseline without indebtedness). Qualitative insights on gratitude from adult and adolescent UK participants further signal the co-occurrence of gratitude with negatively valenced emotions (Gulliford & Morgan, 2018):

> *"Sometimes it can be felt with guilt, or pressure as there is an expectation to return the favour – thus souring the nice feeling of someone doing something for you" (Adult)*
>
> *"It can be embarrassing to feel in someone's debt or to feel their praise" (Adult)*
>
> *"Because when you are grateful you also feel guilty because you always feel like you will owe them something in return" (Adolescent)*

Cross-cultural differences, even across two similar Westernised Commonwealth countries have been noted through the use of these vignettes. In a comparison of UK and Australian adults and adolescents, Morgan et al. (forthcoming) observed that self-reported gratitude in response to all scenarios was extremely similar across UK and Australian adults, however, Australian adolescents reported higher levels of gratitude as compared to UK adolescents. The higher levels of gratitude reported by Australian adolescents was particularly marked in response to ulterior motive, mixed emotion and non-valuable benefit scenarios. When these vignettes were translated into story workbooks for use with children, more Australian children than UK children said that a fictional character would be grateful for a nomination even if this generated mixed emotions in the nominee (73% versus 60%). Qualitative follow up questions in these story workbooks indicated that UK children were more likely than Australian children to infer that these mixed emotions would make the nominee feel guilty (3.2% versus 0.7%), while

Australian children were more likely to predict feelings of discomfort in the fictional character (20% versus 11.3%). Such findings indicate that children and adolescents are also aware of the mixed emotions that gratitude might ensue and, given that gratitude is being adopted into classrooms and curricula (Waters, 2011), this has important implications for educational practice.

4. Pedagogical Implications for Research on Gratitude

We have argued at length elsewhere (Morgan, Gulliford & Carr, 2015; Carr, Morgan & Gulliford, 2015) the dangers of focusing on only the positive aspects of gratitude within educational contexts. Specifically, we have argued for caution and appropriate sensitivity when practising gratitude in classrooms or when caregivers teach children about gratitude at home (Gulliford, 2018). While 'counting blessings' may lead to positive affective responses for many, reflecting on one's benefits may not always be easy or pleasant (especially in group settings where social comparison may be rife). Gratitude intervention research has subsequently reinforced this warning. In a comparison of gratitude practices completed by American and Indian participants, Titova, Wagstaff and Parks (2017) noted how the gratitude practice induced feelings of sadness in participants, and guilt in Indian participants. Indian participants further outlined that the practices made them feel burdensome or in other's debt. Such findings indicate that gratitude interventions may not always lead to positive affective outcomes. In our aforementioned paper on educating gratitude (Morgan et al., 2015), we note that the practice of positive or grateful reframing – reinterpretation of an event or experience as positive in nature or worthy of gratitude – may promote indiscriminate gratitude, rather than gratitude that is appropriately reasoned and warranted based on the particulars of the situation. Moreover, constant positive reinterpretation would be impractical, even anxiety-provoking, and may support the discounting of rational negative reactions.

5. Gratitude and Moral Principles

The status of gratitude as morally praiseworthy has been considered in relation to situations that are marked by social injustice, alongside the implications of this for education. Jackson (2016) outlines how gratitude may conflict with other moral principles. For example, propositional gratitude (or being 'grateful that') could lead to unhelpful downward social comparisons. Some examples here might be, 'I am grateful that I am able to go to school' or 'I am grateful that I have clean water', on the premise that other children are not so lucky. In a similar vein to the critique of grateful reframing above, Jackson highlights how gratitude could prompt ignorance or avoidance of life's problems and denial or minimisation of challenges. In educational settings, educators that encourage downward social comparisons or a blinkered focus on the positive may inadvertently promote servility and ignorance in their students rather than appropriate moral outrage. In truth, educating for moral values, including gratitude, might not always generate positive affective responses and these theoretical arguments signpost the importance of considering gratitude as a moral virtue rather than simply promoting gratitude's instrumental benefits (e.g., life satisfaction and personal wellbeing).

Fortunately, however, gratitude has shown itself to be morally valuable – a topic we briefly considered in our 2013 review paper. Research on the relationship between gratitude and prosociality has received enormous attention, as evident in Ma, Tunney and Fergurson's recent (2017) meta-analysis on the topic. Studies have demonstrated how gratitude prompts direct and indirect reciprocation of benefits. Upstream (indirect) reciprocity describes how gratitude motivates beneficiaries to give to others, feeding prosociality forwards, beyond the original benefactor-beneficiary relationship (person A helps person, B, person B helps person C, McCullough et al., 2001; 2008). Downstream (indirect) reciprocity describes how onlookers can be motivated to help a benefactor in the future through reputation gain, or moral elevation

(person A helps person B, then person C helps person A, Ma et al., 2017), something we referred to as 'quadratic' gratitude in the 2013 review (but see below for a different and more recent interpretation of a four-part construal of gratitude).

These reciprocal behaviours can support the development of new relationships, and maintenance of existing relationships (Algoe, 2012) – which is at least partially supported by the social bonding hormone oxytocin (Algoe & Way, 2014). Ma et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis noted, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the association between gratitude and prosociality was stronger for cases where a specific benefactor was identified. They also noted that the gratitude-prosociality link is stronger for downstream as compared to upstream indirect reciprocity. More recent research has demonstrated that witnessing the expression of gratitude can prompt an onlooker to help the *beneficiary* in the future (person A helps person B, person B expresses gratitude in the presence of person C, person C helps person B, Algoe, Dwyer, Younge & Oveis, 2020). Thereby suggesting another different type of indirect reciprocity, or 'quadratic' structure of gratitude.

Considering the potential shadow side of gratitude, however, Gulliford, Morgan, Abbott & Hemmings (2019) questioned gratitude's prosocial nature and suggested that impression management abilities such as self-monitoring might enable individuals to engage in manipulative, deceptive or self-serving behaviours that masquerade as prosocial. This could include, for example, hidden ulterior motives. Resultantly, gratitude might on occasion be experienced in situations where it is not warranted. This research suggests that the relationship between gratitude and prosociality not only depends on the benefactors' intentions, but also on their abilities and competencies. As this special issue attests, "the line between genuine gratitude and an ingratiating display is hard to draw and often difficult to call" (Gulliford et al. 2019, p. 1030). Whilst research on the shadow side of gratitude has gained traction since our

2013 review, future research should continue to examine gratitude, and its moral and positive nature, with appropriate critical appraisal.

6. The Structure of Gratitude: Dyadic, Triadic & Quadratic Interpretations

In the 2013 paper we drew a distinction between triadic and dyadic understandings of gratitude. The latter concept takes gratitude to be 'the habitual focusing on and appreciation of the positive benefits that life brings in the absence of any specific benefactor' (2013, p. 301), while the former describes the attitudinal relationship of a beneficiary towards a benefactor's benefit. The term 'dyadic' referenced the two-part structure of gratitude (benefit and beneficiary), while 'triadic' spoke to the three elements of benefactor, benefit and beneficiary. In the literature, the term 'propositional gratitude' is used interchangeably with 'dyadic gratitude'. This can be contrasted with 'targeted gratitude' which describes the triadic understanding. We observed that most philosophical treatments of gratitude assume the triadic concept, (though note McAleer, 2012 is a notable exception). In this special issue, McConnell uses 't-gratefulness' and 'p-gratefulness', to reflect targeted and propositional gratitude respectively, while van Hulzen coins the term 'reflective gratitude' for a dyadic understanding. (One cannot help wondering whether it would be less confusing were 'standard' terms of reference to be agreed).

In the 2013 paper we alluded to the possibility of extending the three-part account of gratitude to include a fourth element where gratitude is experienced vicariously by someone close to the recipient of the benefit. In the scenario we had in mind, a benefactor gives a young man some money to the latter's evident delight. The young man's mother observes how happy and grateful her son is and feels gratitude towards the benefactor too (Gulliford et al., 2013, p. 306). We proposed that this relatable scenario, which does not fit the triadic account could be characterised as having a 'quadratic structure'. The label 'quadratic' could also be

meaningfully applied in the context of upstream and downstream reciprocity and, more recently, the 'witnessing effect' of gratitude observed by Algoe et al. (2020).

We have recently become aware of another four-part construal of gratitude since our 2013 paper was published. Psychologists Jessica Navarro and Jonathan Tudge have recently called for *reciprocity* (from a beneficiary to a benefactor) to be a required component of gratitude, lest gratitude slide into mere appreciation (Navarro & Tudge, 2020). In an analysis of 82 papers published since 2012 examining child and adolescent research into what their authors have termed gratitude, they found that the most widely used definition is that of three-part gratitude, which was used in 36% of studies (Navarro & Morris, 2018). They reported that 21% involved a four-part construal which included the element of reciprocation.

Navarro and Tudge (2020) contend that a beneficiary can *feel* grateful to others without ever attempting to reciprocate, and therefore could ultimately be justifiably viewed as ungrateful rather than grateful, even when recording high levels of reported grateful feelings in self-report questionnaires. In their view, gratitude requires a beneficiary not only to appreciate benefits received from a benefactor, but also to be moved to reciprocate when a suitable opportunity arises. Thus, they stipulate a fourth component in the structure of gratitude (reciprocation), that should characterise the beneficiary's response. In their recent treatment of gratitude, Navarro and Tudge (2020) challenge recent (positive) psychological research which, they argue, conflates gratitude with appreciation. That it is possible to score high on one or other of the existing measures of gratitude and nonetheless be viewed as an *ungrateful person* occurs because reporting genuine grateful *feelings* towards a benefactor could be undermined by that same person's unwillingness to reciprocate a benefactor's kindness behaviourally later on. They propose that this final element of reciprocity is essential to the definition of gratitude, just as *lack* of reciprocity defines ingratitude (Navarro & Tudge, 2020, p. 7).

McConnell (1993) was surely right that gratitude necessarily involves an accompanying feeling of gratefulness to be fully and authentically realized; it is not enough to merely go through the motions of expressing thanks or reciprocating gifts (McConnell, 1993, pp. 56–61). However, while grateful feelings in the beneficiary are necessary for gratitude, they should not be taken to be sufficient; gratitude involves *feeling good,* but it also requires reciprocity towards benefactors when possible. From a moral educational point of view it is important to encourage the autonomous sense of moral obligation to reciprocate benefits and go beyond merely encouraging appreciation or saying 'thank you' in order to promote the development of gratitude as a *virtue* (Navarro & Tudge, 2020 p. 11), and not simply a means of capitalising upon or 'boosting' the beneficiary's positive mood.

The paper by Navarro and Tudge (2020) raises interesting questions about whether reciprocation is a *component* of gratitude, or whether it is a separate construct. In the light of the foregoing, one might also ask whether the reciprocity needs to be aimed *exclusively* at the benefactor, or whether it could include indirect reciprocal behaviours of the sort entertained by Ma et al. (2017). One particular scenario (which could be tested empirically with vignettes or experimental studies) is whether gratitude to an unknown benefactor would still prompt reciprocity towards others.

7. Conclusion

As this reflective update has shown, research on gratitude has made great strides since the publication of our 2013 paper. We followed our own recommendations for future research in pursuing bottom-up studies of what gratitude means for laypeople. This has included prototype analyses of gratitude and vignette questionnaires (and storybooks for younger participants) which examined the conceptual contours of gratitude in adults, adolescents and children.

Moreover, the vignettes were later incorporated into a multi-component measure of gratitude that was able to tap respondents' conceptual understanding of gratitude (Morgan et al., 2017).

In making good on these promises, we have been able to examine claims about the nature of gratitude, such as whether it requires supererogation, whether benefactors' intentions rule out gratitude (they do not), and whether gratitude is a quintessentially positive and unalloyed good, as many have supposed. In the process of our examination we have joined the ranks of researchers examining gratitude from cross-cultural perspectives – an endeavour that is much needed if a universalising discourse on the social complexities of this virtue is to be avoided.

We unite with Navarro and Tudge (2020) and Jackson (2016) in calling attention to the way gratitude is fostered in educational contexts (Morgan et al, 2015; Carr, Morgan & Gulliford, 2015). The question of how gratitude should be promoted has risen to prominence since the publication of our 2013 paper, spurred on perhaps in no small measure by positive psychological use of gratitude interventions. Practices such as the 'Gratitude Visit' have been found to be successful components of positive educational practices, reliably increasing happiness and reducing depression in experimental participants (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). However, we align with those who argue that gratitude must be taught in a way which foregrounds its status as a *virtue* (Navarro & Tudge, 2020), which needs to be cultivated with an awareness of its relation to other moral principles and virtues with which it may even conflict (Jackson, 2016). This approach is necessary if we are to see beyond advocating gratitude instrumentally for its beneficial effects, which risks losing sight of moral reasons for cultivating this valued human strength.

In 2013 we made the bold suggestion that philosophers pay heed to the work of social scientists, as a good conceptual analysis needs to respect ordinary thinking to avoid superimposing characterizations that do not reflect lay understanding. We are pleased to report

that this is evident, not only in Bob Roberts' kind acknowledgement (Roberts, 2015, p. 24) but also in interdisciplinary textbooks on virtue that have aimed to integrate psychological and philosophical insights, such as Snow (2018) and Wright, Warren & Snow (2020). There seems now to be more of a bridge between conceptual and empirical work on gratitude – and indeed other virtues – than there was in 2013. Such an approach is exemplified in McConnell's contribution to this special issue, which draws on psychological and neurological research to elucidate and enrich philosophical argument.

However, while evidence of a welcome rapprochement between philosophers and psychologists abounds (not least within the pages of this Special Issue), debate seems to have multiplied in terms of whether gratitude has a two-part, three-part or four-part structure, and if the latter, what these four components are: upstream reciprocity, downstream reciprocity or simple reciprocity to benefactors. These considerations bear witness to the complexity of gratitude, a topic whose meaning may, rather ironically, have been taken for granted by too many for too long. We are confident that there is much still to be done, particularly in terms of examining cross-cultural differences in understanding and expressing gratitude. As befits this Special Issue, however, we also call attention to the need for research on gratitude to consider its possible shadow side, and with that in mind we invite you to contemplate the contributions we introduce here.

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