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GRATITUDE TOWARDS STATES OF AFFAIRS

Bachelor's Thesis

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
1 Definitions and Groundwork.....	5
1.1 What is gratitude? .....	5
1.1.1 As an emotion .....	5
1.1.2 As an attitude .....	6
1.1.3 As a disposition.....	7
1.1.4 As a virtuous disposition.....	7
1.2 Two forms of gratitude .....	8
1.2.1 Targeted gratitude .....	9
1.2.2 Propositional gratitude .....	9
2 The Justification of Propositional Gratitude .....	10
2.1 The connection with humility.....	10
2.2 The grateful action tendency .....	13
2.3 A form of valuing .....	16
3 The Fundamental Form of Gratitude.....	19
3.1 An overlap between the two forms of gratitude .....	19
3.2 Gratitude, religion, and anthropomorphism .....	20
4 Conclusion.....	23
References .....	24
Tänuikkus asjaolude suhtes.....	25

## Introduction

Gratitude plays an important role in people's day-to-day lives. How we respond to other people's benevolence towards us shows a lot about our character and intentions. Being grateful shows that we appreciate others. It is therefore understandable how gratitude can contribute to pro-social behaviour (Watkins 2014: 65). In addition, gratitude is thought to have various benefits to the grateful person himself. For example, based on psychological research, gratitude is highly correlated with measured well-being and happiness (Szcześniak 2011; McCullough et al 2002: 113-114). Philip C. Watkins in his book on gratitude says that gratitude helps people live well because it identifies and amplifies the good in one's life (2014: 8). This seems like a fair point because, indeed, when we are grateful for something we focus on something positive and make the positive more visible to ourselves. This means that our mental states become more positive—a promising pillar of happiness. But while we have begun to research the benefits of gratitude on society and individuals, there are still important philosophical issues concerning our understanding of gratitude that need to be solved. What I will examine in this thesis concerns the class of objects that gratitude can be felt towards, and a more precise view of what constitutes gratitude.

Usually, when speaking of gratitude, we have in mind the warm-hearted recognition of something nice done to us by another person. When being thus benefitted, the grateful person will feel a special regard for one's benefactor and will become inclined to reciprocate. This understanding of gratitude paints a picture in which gratitude is strictly social—something between one person and another.<sup>1</sup> However, this might not be the full picture. If gratitude is about focusing on the good in one's life, must it be the case that this good be provided by *someone*? In my thesis, I will show that gratitude need not be limited to only those cases when another person has intentionally benefitted us. I will argue that gratitude can also be felt towards states of affairs, which need not be brought about by an intentional agent. Intuitively, most people would agree that the grateful person will not only appreciate other people, but also a wide variety of life-circumstances and events. This is supported by the fact that the empirical psychologists who study the disposition<sup>2</sup> of gratitude often include both measurements—of how people report their experiences in relation to other people's benevolence; and how people report their experiences towards (good) states of affairs (cf. McCullough et al 2002). At the same time,

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<sup>1</sup> Or, between multiple people, or between a god and a person. What matters is that both parties be construed as intentional agents, capable of bestowing benefits on the one end and recognizing them on the other end.

<sup>2</sup>In some psychological research, 'disposition' is used interchangeably with 'trait'.

analyses of laypeople’s conceptions of gratitude highlight a similar story—of gratitude being associated with (and felt towards) not only other people, but also a wide variety of (fortunate) circumstances and events (Lambert et al 2009: 1204). Perhaps, then, there might be merit to the idea that there exists a wider notion of gratitude, not limited in its focus to other people. At any rate, this is worth further investigation.

However, most philosophers who have published papers on gratitude regard it as a strictly interpersonal matter.<sup>3</sup> Most of the time, philosophers tend to dismiss talk of “gratitude”, when it is not directed at an intentional agent, as being about some form of gladness, joy, or appreciation instead, and not really about gratitude. Very few efforts have been undertaken to understand and justify gratitude’s place outside of personal relationships, or interpersonal affairs in general. Notable exceptions are Sean McAleer and A. D. M. Walker, who have both tried to understand gratitude in a wider perspective—as an attitude not limited in its focus to other people, but including states of affairs as well. McAleer has attempted this by claiming that gratitude involves a connection with humility; Walker has attempted this by claiming that gratitude involves a distinct action tendency in which the grateful “desires to make a return”. In this thesis, I will examine both of their positions and ultimately defend McAleer’s position, that gratitude involves humility, from the criticisms of Tony Manela, who is the most vocal opponent of widening the scope of gratitude beyond interpersonal affairs. Walker’s position that gratitude involves a “desire to make a return” will remain refuted by Manela. However, I will argue similarly to Walker that gratitude has a distinct action tendency which unifies gratitude to other people and gratitude towards states of affairs as species of the same *genus*. Having done all this, I will also argue that both forms of gratitude are essentially a similar form of valuing, albeit directed towards different types of intentional objects.

The thesis is divided into three parts. I will begin in the first part by defining the relevant terminology and expanding on the concepts of targeted and propositional gratitude<sup>4</sup>. In the second part, I will defend the claim that gratitude can be felt towards states of affairs equally coherently as towards other people—this is to claim that gratitude to other people and gratitude towards states of affairs are essentially species of the same *genus*. In the third and final part, I will show that propositional gratitude (gratitude towards states of affairs) is fairly common and even more fundamental than gratitude to other people.

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. Manela 2016; Kristjansson 2015; Carr 2013; Roberts 2004.

<sup>4</sup> “Propositional gratitude” is just another way to say “gratitude towards states of affairs“. I prefer to use the latter when talking generally because it is more intuitive. The former works best in complex sentences.

# 1 Definitions and Groundwork

This section of the thesis lays the conceptual foundation for the upcoming defence. In the first part, I will elaborate on four different coexisting ways in which gratitude can be understood and observed. In the second part, I will elaborate upon a distinction regarding the objects towards which gratitude can be felt. This will bring us to a basic understanding of the terminology and will allow me to continue with my main point.

## 1.1 What is gratitude?

When talking about gratitude we might have a few different ideas in mind. The most common, perhaps, is to think of gratitude as a feeling of appreciation and goodwill towards someone who has done us good. Often a good place to start, the Oxford English Dictionary defines gratitude as “[t]he quality or condition of being grateful; a warm sense of appreciation of kindness received, involving a feeling of goodwill towards the benefactor and a desire to do something in return; gratefulness” (OED Online). This illustrates what we usually mean by gratitude pretty well. Nevertheless, a certain element of gratitude seems already embedded in this definition of what constitutes gratitude—the condition of being benefitted by *someone*. It is this condition that my thesis tries to get rid of; working towards a more inclusive understanding of gratitude and what it means to be grateful. For this purpose, it is useful to first take a deeper look at gratitude from a few different perspectives. Most important for my thesis is the view of gratitude as an emotion and as an attitude. But further depth is added by having a look at gratitude also as a disposition, and as a virtuous disposition. For this part of the thesis, I will stick to the mainstream idea of gratitude as only felt towards benefactors, as I could not yet have proven otherwise.

### 1.1.1 As an emotion

An emotion is best understood as an isolated and temporary episode—a state of mind that consist of a cognitive evaluation and an accompanying feeling, and is directed at some particular object. For gratitude, the characteristic cognitive evaluation consists of coming to terms with, or contemplating, the fact that one has been benefitted (by another); the

accompanying feeling is positive and pleasant, unless mixed with other thoughts or emotions which come to forefront (e.g. feeling indebted). In prototypical cases, the object of gratitude is someone's goodwill towards us—we might also contemplate on the particular act or item received, but it is generally thought that the main thing we value is someone's caring attitude towards us (that happens to be manifested by a particular act of kindness). This is so, because often we feel deep gratitude even for failed but honest attempts by someone to benefit us. It is worth noting that, paradigmatically, the source of the benefit is viewed as external—one is rarely grateful towards oneself. Taking responsibility for the good in one's life is the appraisal that leads to pride, a quite contrary emotion to gratitude (Watkins 2014: 18).

It is also widely accepted that emotions have characteristic action tendencies. Different emotions prepare us to act in different ways (ibid. 19). Fear, for example, makes us avoid the object of our emotion (that which we fear). The action tendencies of gratitude portray a heightened concern for the benefactor; a wish to reciprocate some benefit, and to maintain the relationship. In this way, through action tendencies and evaluations, emotions contribute to attitudes, which I will explore next.

### **1.1.2 As an attitude**

An attitude is a settled way of thinking or feeling about something. Compared to an emotion, an attitude is more persistent and prevails even if the particular emotion has currently faded. Similarly to emotions, attitudes are about some particular object. Attitudes express our values and influence our actions (towards the object of our attitude). An attitude is a *form of regard* or a mode of *seeing as*; to have an affective attitude is to respond with distinctive patterns of affect and attention (Bell 2011: 451). Having a grateful attitude towards someone would mean seeing that person in light of the good they have done us and being motivated in the appropriate circumstances to express our gratefulness. This does not require that we must constantly have a particular feeling of gratitude, but rather, that we be dispositioned in a grateful manner towards that individual. For example, if a neighbour offers to help me move in some new furniture I ordered, I might become more inclined to help her out in the future, because my attitude towards her now includes an additional element of gratitude. Attitudes are generally thought of as being towards some localised or specific thing, unlike dispositions, which are more general in their focus.

### **1.1.3 As a disposition**

A disposition<sup>5</sup> is the propensity, tendency or readiness to act (or feel) in a specified way. Differently from emotions and attitudes, dispositions form a stable part of our character and influence how we react, act, or feel towards multiple things in various situations. The grateful disposition is the tendency to respond with grateful emotion towards the benevolence of others. The grateful disposition makes us more attentive to the benevolence of others, and, in that sense, expands the circle of the objects of our gratitude. In a similar vein, it might also be said that the grateful disposition lowers the threshold of experiencing gratitude (Emmons 2016: 143). McCullough and colleagues have suggested four facets of the grateful disposition that this lowered threshold might consist of: a) intensity—more intense experiences of gratitude; b) frequency—more frequent experiences of gratitude; c) span—feeling gratitude for a wider variety of things; d) denseness—feeling gratitude towards greater number of people (2002: 113). In general terms, the gratefully dispositioned person will have the tendency to recognize benefits and the readiness to respond with gratitude. It is usually applaudable to be grateful in many circumstances, and this is what the grateful disposition prompts. But the grateful disposition alone is not always sufficient for praise—for this, we need the virtue of gratitude.

### **1.1.4 As a virtuous disposition**

In Aristotelian terms, a virtue is the disposition to feel and act in the right manner—in the right circumstances, towards the right people or objects, for the right reasons. A virtue is not a passing state but a persistent trait of character that promotes the good of self and others. Virtues are inherently valuable dispositions that help us navigate our way towards the good life or *eudaimonia*. Aristotelian virtue ethics is based on the ‘doctrine of the mean’ which states that virtues lie devoid of excess and deficiency, being properly balanced. That is to say that the right action or emotion, coming from the right disposition, is always an appropriate response to the given situation. For example, sometimes a raging outburst of anger is an appropriate response; that is, when someone has done something horrific to us and anything less than rage would constitute cowardice or lack of self-respect on our part (i.e. a vice).

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<sup>5</sup> A disposition may also be called an affective trait, cf. Watkins 2014, p. 21.

The virtue of gratitude, therefore, is the disposition to be grateful for the right things, to the right people, to the right degree, for the right reasons etc. The virtuously grateful person will feel the emotion of gratitude and will hold a grateful attitude, but only insofar as it would be the right thing to do, given the specific circumstances. For example, being grateful towards someone who intended to harm us but failed, and instead benefitted us in some coincidental manner, would be misdirected and lacking in virtue, because we should not be grateful towards people with malicious intentions.

An Aristotelian analysis of gratitude has been provided by Kristján Kristjánsson. He finds a place for gratitude in the doctrine of the mean, demarking its deficiencies and excesses. In the final analyses, however, Kristjánsson finds the proper application for gratitude in the constructs of the idea of ‘poetic justice’ which is an emotional disposition that finds pleasure when people get what they deserve. Gratitude, for Kristjánsson, is the virtue that in some respect takes care that people get what they deserve (the benefactor in particular) through actions and dispositions that are benevolent (Kristjánsson 2015: 509-510).

## **1.2 Two forms of gratitude**

In this part of the thesis, I will elaborate upon two distinct ways to conceptualize and formulate gratitude. Both of them are generic, used by different philosophers, and should not raise an issue.<sup>6</sup> I will call the first “targeted gratitude” and the second “propositional gratitude”, following Sean McAleer (2012). I follow Tony Manela’s analysis to open their precise content (2016). Both of these forms of gratitude have things in common and things that differ. What they have in common is related to their emotional and attitudinal aspects; what they differ in is their intentional objects. My argument in the next section is that what they have in common is essential to the idea of gratitude and marks them both as species of the same *genus*, hence both versions are properly called gratitude. For the purposes of clarity, and while acknowledging that this is something that still needs to be proved, targeted gratitude and propositional gratitude will nevertheless now be provisionally labelled as “the two forms of gratitude”.

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<sup>6</sup> Both the proponents and opponents of the wider notion of gratitude (gratitude towards states of affairs) have construed these terms in similar ways, with only minute and negligible differences.



### 1.2.1 Targeted gratitude

The most widely accepted form of gratitude is essentially a *triadic* concept, composed of three elements. It is best expressed like this:

Y is grateful *to* R for  $\phi$ -ing,

where Y is a beneficiary, R is a benefactor, and  $\phi$  something that R did to benefit Y. I will call this type of gratitude targeted gratitude, because it focuses on a certain benefactor towards whom we are grateful. What is important here is that the target of gratitude be some intentional agent, capable of providing that which is seen as a benefit. That is to say, to feel grateful (*to* somebody) for something, we must see this something as being given to us with the intent to benefit us. Usual examples include: being grateful *to* one's parents for their care; being grateful *to* a friend for a gift; being grateful *to* god for the good health of one's beloved. This is the most common way of understanding gratitude, and many philosophers believe it to be the only correct way.

### 1.2.2 Propositional gratitude

Another way to possibly feel gratitude is to simply focus on some state of affairs that is seen as constituting a benefit. This leaves aside the concern for a benefactor and can thus be formulated like this:

Y is grateful *that* p,

where Y is a beneficiary and p some proposition that Y finds beneficial. For example, one may be grateful *that* he has good health; or grateful *that* he won the lottery. This is a *dyadic* gratitude relation, composed of two elements. It is important to note that here the beneficiary is not grateful to an agent, but simply for a benefit. I will call this propositional gratitude, because it focuses on some proposition. Compared to targeted gratitude, the grateful person in this scenario sees something as constituting a benefit, regardless of whether this something was given by *someone*, or with the intent to provide a benefit. The question "who gave me this?" might not even arise or be intelligible in some such cases. Further examples may include: being grateful *that* one found a loving partner; being grateful *that* the rain has come (to water the crops); being grateful *that* an asteroid missed the earth.

## 2 The Justification of Propositional Gratitude

As we saw from the last section, the only difference between targeted gratitude and propositional gratitude is that the former involves an extra concern, the benefactor. What they have in common is seeing oneself as being benefitted, whether by someone in particular or by a lucky chance. In the following I will expand upon two further, more specific, aspects of gratitude and I will show that these are essential and constitutive parts of gratitude. The first is the connection with humility; the second is the action tendency of the grateful agent. To prove the connection with humility, I will defend Sean McAleer's position. To prove the similar action tendency, I will first consider A. D. M. Walker's position but eventually abandon it in favour of my own. I will show that the connection with humility and the similar action tendency are both unifying conditions of the two forms of gratitude. I will also consider some counterarguments given by the philosopher Tony Manela to both McAleer and Walker. I will agree with criticisms to Walker but defend McAleer's position. Finally, I will consider Manela's claim that propositional gratitude is nothing more than a form of appreciation, which, he thinks, makes it conceptually different from targeted gratitude. I will show this to be false. Instead, at the heart of both targeted and propositional gratitude is a special form of valuing. Having shown all this, it will be safe to assume that both—targeted and propositional—versions are equally deserving of the name 'gratitude', and that the burden of proof is on the sceptics if they want to show that the two forms of gratitude are wholly different concepts.

### 2.1 The connection with humility

Sean McAleer in his 2012 article "Propositional Gratitude" claims that gratitude is an expression of humility.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, he argues that the two forms of gratitude are both unified by their connection with humility. "When one is grateful *that* or grateful *to*, one responds to an unmerited benefit by recognizing it as in fact a benefit, as unmerited, and as not flowing from one's own agency—regardless of whether it results from another's agency or not"<sup>8</sup> (McAleer 2012: 60). There are two aspects here that are worth noting. The first is that gratitude involves a recognition that we have not earned the benefit, and in that sense the benefit is 'undeserved'. The other is that gratitude involves a recognition of our agency being limited, and in that sense,

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<sup>7</sup> This is to say that gratitude is an important way in which the virtue of humility manifests itself.

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis added.

we recognize our ‘dependence’ on outside influences (ibid.). These aspects indeed seem to provide a tight conceptual connection between humility and gratitude—given that in most cases some humble (yet accurate) recognition of our own circumstances is required in order to see the benefits that surround us, and to see how they are not always due to our own efforts. Unless we had some humility, we would come to view the world in a very twisted sense, as if we were somehow special and everything was due to come our way. In that sense, gratitude would become unintelligible, because what the grateful emotion and attitude capture is something that is seen as a benefit. Benefits, however, are not really compatible with seeing them as being owed to oneself: “If one regards the benefit as something due when it is not, one fails to “estimate [it] aright”” (ibid.). In both targeted and propositional cases of gratitude the grateful person must come to a humble realization that the benefit (if it is to be seen as a benefit) is not flowing from one’s own agency and is in that sense ‘dependent’ on outside forces—either the free actions of other people or forces of nature—which are in no way bound to provide one with benefits.

This position has been criticised by the philosopher Tony Manela. Manela thinks that humility is not a necessary condition for gratitude and thus not a unifying feature for the two forms of gratitude. His interpretation of McAleer’s notion of humility in gratitude rightly brings forth the aspects of “undeservedness” (of the benefit) and “dependence” (on other people or events), which he then rejects (Manela 2016: 288). First, he invites us to imagine an all-around altruistic and well-meaning person, who suddenly falls ill with no one to save his life, although it would require very little to do so. Luckily, however, just before he perishes, a helping hand is given by a benevolent stranger (ibid. 288-289). Manela tells us that surely gratitude is appropriate on the part of the beneficiary here, but it need not be the case that he must now come to believe that the benevolence was unmerited and that he did not really deserve it. Manela thinks that the beneficiary in this situation could appropriately notice the benevolence of the stranger and feel grateful without requiring humility to do so—at least not in the sense of feeling undeserved. On the face of it, this might seem plausible. I agree that it is not necessary for the beneficiary to feel undeserved or to undervalue his own agency in order to feel gratitude. But this example only addresses the “undeservedness” condition, without mentioning the “dependence” condition. Surely the beneficiary’s well-being was in some way dependent on the benefactor? The beneficiary’s gratitude is appropriately accounted for by his humble recognition of himself as a fragile and dependent being whose needs were met. Manela’s criticism about the “undeservedness” condition is therefore right, but he fails to account for the

“dependence” condition with this example, which by itself would be sufficient to establish the connection with humility.

It seems to me that Manela’s take on humility is too restrictive and not in line with McAleer’s position; humility is not just about recognizing what one does or does not deserve. McAleer’s take on humility is from Bernard Gert, who says that: “Humility involves a recognition of one’s fallibility and vulnerability... [the humble] is keenly aware of his dependence not only on the physical world but also on the social world” (Gert 1998: 306-307). Therefore, the account of gratitude as an expression of humility could be developed further by noticing that while the agent (beneficiary) may hold true beliefs about his merits and deserve to be rescued, he can also be humbled by the fact that he came so close to death, which makes him notice his own frailty and dependence on others. But Manela seems to have an answer to this as well. He deals with the “dependence” condition separately in another brief example. He notices that sometimes we can be grateful for gifts or favours that we can do without—on the receiving of which our well-being in no way hinges; therefore, we do not always “depend” on someone or something else when receiving benefits (Manela 2016: 289). Again, fair point, but this does not take away from the fact that to receive the benefit in the first place—even if we only value the goodwill in it—is dependent on something we are not the source of. Humility helps us to properly recognize this feature. Our well-being need not depend on other people, but anytime we notice a benefit, we must see it as dependent on circumstances outside our control, whether it be fate or other people’s goodwill—things which lay outside one’s control and could have turned out otherwise.

Manela’s point that humility is not a necessary condition for gratitude (*ibid.*) is thus false, as it is unimaginable to appropriately recognize and appreciate benefits if one were to miss the humility that allows bringing the benefit into view, as always something outside our control. Manela did not deal with the dependency condition sufficiently enough to show that humility has no necessary connection to gratitude. Instead, it seems that some form of humility is necessary for gratitude. Furthermore, it can be shown to exist in both forms of gratitude, making it their unifying condition. In targeted gratitude our receiving a benefit depends on other people; in propositional gratitude our receiving a benefit depends (usually) on some fortunate event. In either case, dependent on circumstances outside our control and not always bound to happen.

## 2.2 The grateful action tendency

An inherent part of being grateful is how we respond<sup>9</sup> to benefits. If someone were to spend a great deal of effort in her best hopes to be nice towards us, or to help us out of misery, and we failed to recognize it or failed to return a gift or even a thanks, it would definitely seem we were not truly grateful. The belief that gratitude entails care and goodwill towards the benefactor is taken to be true by all philosophers. But there is one philosopher for whom the grateful response must not be limited to benefactors only. In his 1980 article “Gratefulness and Gratitude”<sup>10</sup> A. D. M. Walker claims that the two forms of gratitude are unified by their similar action tendency whereby the grateful person wants to benefit someone else, or “desires to make a return”. “[The grateful] wants to favour another because he has been favoured himself”<sup>11</sup> (Walker 1980: 49). It is obvious that in targeted cases of gratitude the person whom we should be grateful towards and whom we should wish to benefit in return is our benefactor. Walker, however, seems to claim that even in propositional cases, when there is no one in particular who brought the benefit about, the grateful person would feel the need to benefit *someone*. But why exactly would the grateful wish to benefit somebody else in this scenario? One possible explanation is that the beneficiary might come to view oneself as being unjustly benefitted, or in an advantageous position compared to others. The resulting benevolence would be a way to make up for the imbalance, a way to justify one’s being fortunate. This would make gratitude justice-based. But Walker explicitly denies this option. Walker says that the grateful person must not have any other motives (besides gratitude) for his benevolence, because otherwise the benevolence does not truly arise from gratitude but from a rather different concern (e.g. justice) (ibid. 50). For Walker, the grateful response is simply the desire to *favour* another, because one has been favoured himself (ibid. 49). The grateful response, rather than being based on justice, is explained by the generosity which gratitude elicits (ibid. 50).

Walker’s position that targeted and propositional gratitude are unified by the action tendency whereby the grateful wishes to benefit another agent, has been criticised by Tony Manela. Manela disapproves of this unifying feature as too strong for propositional gratitude. He says that somebody who has been blessed by good fortune but has no desire to benefit someone else “is not necessarily an ingrate”, insofar as he “never took his luck for granted” and

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<sup>9</sup> In this section, what I mean by the “grateful response“ is just the action tendency of the grateful agent, i.e. what the grateful person typically does or wants to do. It is important to note that action tendencies must not always come to fruition, they are more akin to dispositions in this sense.

<sup>10</sup> What I call propositional gratitude Walker calls ‘gratefulness’; he calls targeted gratitude simply ‘gratitude’.

<sup>11</sup> I believe *favour* is synonymous with *benefit* in our discussion.

“lived each day to the fullest” (Manela 2016: 284). This criticism seems plausible and I agree with Manela on this point. Indeed, it seems too demanding to require that the (propositionally) grateful person always be inclined to benefit someone else. In propositional cases, there is no necessary relationship between two agents and therefore it seems that the gratitude can become a wholly personal matter instead. This provides good reason to believe that the action tendency whereby the grateful wants to benefit someone else cannot be a necessary condition for propositional gratitude. Hence, even if targeted gratitude involved this condition, it would not unify the two forms of gratitude.

But I believe we need not end the investigation here. Although Walker’s conception of the grateful response provided us with the desire to benefit another agent, it might be reasonable to suggest that there are other ways in which the grateful person could respond to benefits, depending on the relevant circumstances. In interpersonal (targeted) cases of gratitude, the appropriate response requires that one (at least) have a caring disposition towards one’s benefactor. In propositional cases, however, it is usually more difficult to say what the right course of action is. But this is not to say that there is never an available course to take. I believe that it is hereby useful to make sense of the grateful response as having in its focus something of perceived value (the benefit). And therefore, the grateful action tendency is just the way in which the grateful person would respond to the perceived value in the benefit. I propose that the grateful person must see the benefit as something good or valuable, and therefore worth preserving (maintaining) and promoting (contributing to).<sup>12</sup> In targeted cases of gratitude, what the grateful person wishes to preserve and promote is his benefactor’s goodwill (and their personal relationship). In propositional cases, the grateful person wishes to preserve or promote the goodness in some state of affairs. In short, I propose that the grateful action tendency is to be conceived of as preserving and promoting the benefit.

An interesting case of gratitude that can help us better understand the grateful action tendency can be built on the basis of one of Walker’s examples. In Walker’s own example, a shipwrecked seaman is cast ashore by a freak wave. It is by pure luck that the seaman survived. Walker tells us that the seaman may express his gratitude by “action to benefit the local

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<sup>12</sup> An objection to this could be made by noticing that some benefits worthy of gratitude are not always worth preserving or promoting. For example, the rain that has come to water the crops. One could rightly feel grateful that the rain has come, but it would be silly to demand that his gratitude is only legitimate insofar as he wishes the rain would fall forever. Here, we must notice that the gratitude is only in relation to the value proposition of the state of affairs. Hence, if the state of affairs starts to lose its value proposition (the rain becomes too much—a flood), then there is nothing to be grateful over anymore, as the state of affairs is not constitutive of a benefit (or valuable) anymore. This only proves that the grateful action tendency stays in accordance with the perceived value.

villagers, or his fellow-seaman or... almost anyone” (Walker 1980: 50). But we can also imagine that the man was cast ashore on an uninhabited island, after many a night floating on a plank and hoping to survive. Is it, then, that there is no way to be grateful, given that there is no one there to thank or benefit in return? I think not. While I agree with Manela that gratitude does not always require of us that we be inclined to benefit another person, I do not think that the grateful response must be limited in this specific way. The grateful response is dependent on how we deal with the specific benefit and therefore there are multiple ways in which the person can be either grateful or ungrateful. If, for example, the man cast ashore would sit around all day, waiting to die or hoping for another miracle, he is hardly grateful. If, on the other hand, he takes the responsibility to make the most of his circumstances and tries to find a way to survive, he is, after all, grateful. Similarly, in targeted gratitude, the appropriate response is to preserve and promote the beneficial affairs, by returning some favour to one’s benefactor or simply by expressing thanks.

The grateful action tendency is best understood as the wish to properly appreciate and value the benefit (or beneficial affairs). In cases of targeted gratitude, what we value as a benefit is another person’s goodwill towards us and this is what the grateful attitude tries to maintain and contribute to (or “keep alive”). In propositional cases of gratitude, the grateful response is more dependent on the specific circumstances and the benefit itself. In any case, it should at least entail a heightened concern for whatever it is that constitutes the benefit. For example, if one sees their whole life as a gift or benefit, it would entail that they appreciate it and take good care of it (as in the example of the cast ashore seaman). And if the benefit is something a bit more trivial (like a loaf of bread), the grateful agent will consider the best use for it, and might thus be inclined to share it with others, to preserve and promote the value of the benefit (if he is not particularly hungry himself). In any case, the grateful person will make the best use of the benefit and will not waste it. This truth about gratitude can be applied to both targeted and propositional forms of gratitude.

I have now expanded on the notion of the grateful action tendency and shown that the two forms of gratitude are united by it. Therefore, I believe that Manela has overlooked the possibility of the two forms of gratitude being unified by some other action tendencies, other than Walker’s. The feature that unifies targeted and propositional gratitude is the grateful person’s action tendency whereby the grateful person tries to preserve and promote the benefit in the spirit of “keeping it alive” (or in valuing it as the benefit it is).

### 2.3 A form of valuing

Lastly, to prove his point about the separateness of targeted and propositional gratitude, Manela has tried to show that while propositional gratitude is reducible to a form of appreciation (and nothing more), targeted gratitude need not involve any element of appreciation. I will first review his concept of appreciation and show that it is insufficient to capture the whole of propositional gratitude. After that, I will refute Manela's claim that appreciation can come apart from targeted gratitude and therefore mark a conceptual difference between the two forms of gratitude. Eventually, however, I will show that the two forms of gratitude share something even more substantial than mere appreciation—they can both be understood as the same form of valuing.

According to Manela's conception, appreciation, in general, involves being properly aware of (or recognizing) the value of something good, and *enjoying* it (Manela 2016: 289). He marks the relevant form of appreciation to be *prudential* appreciation, which appreciates the good that happens to oneself. To make the case that propositional gratitude amounts to such appreciation, Manela uses an example of an ex-orphan, Yoshi, who was raised by a kind and caring foster family, the Reagans. Yoshi is very appreciative of the fact that he was given a nice home and all the benefits and opportunities of life; "he reminds himself every morning when he wakes up how lucky he is to have been adopted by the Reagans, and he dedicates himself to making the most of the education and the other benefits they provided him" (ibid. 282). Nevertheless, he feels no real connection to the Reagans and later in life, being a successful and wealthy man, does not wish to reciprocate and benefit the Reagans when they suffer financial distress (ibid.). It is clear that Yoshi is not grateful *to* the Reagans, because he does not care for their well-being, but he is at least appreciative.

Manela tells us that Yoshi's case is perfectly captured by the notion of prudential appreciation, over which the idea of propositional gratitude has nothing substantial to offer, and therefore they are not different concepts. But I believe Manela's take on appreciation here is too loose to make full justice to his own example as an instance of propositional gratitude. It is true that Yoshi is *at least* appreciative, but this definition of appreciation does not capture the full force of his attitude. He does not simply give the right estimation of value to something *enjoyable* that happened to him. It seems obvious to infer from Manela's example that Yoshi must have also recognized his dependence on the Reagan family, which requires at least some humility. Furthermore, Manela told us that Yoshi dedicated himself to making the most of the



benefits that he was provided, which aligns with what I said earlier about preserving and promoting the benefit.<sup>13</sup> In this case, propositional gratitude, as I have defended it, gives further depth to understanding Yoshi's situation. It seems, then, that propositional gratitude is not really reducible to prudential appreciation as Manela suggests.

Next, I will consider Manela's claim that targeted gratitude need not involve appreciation and is therefore conceptually different from propositional gratitude (because the latter does involve appreciation). I will show instead, that Manela's concept of appreciation applies to both forms of gratitude. Ultimately, however, I will argue that both forms of gratitude involve something even more substantial than mere appreciation—they can both be understood as a stronger form of valuing. Understanding gratitude as a more in-depth form of valuing is better because it functions as a necessary and sufficient condition for gratitude while Manela's concept of appreciation would simply be one possible necessary condition. This means that I will show an even greater conceptual overlap between the two forms of gratitude.

Manela claims that gratitude *to* a benefactor is totally distinct from appreciating the benevolent qualities of the benefactor (ibid. 290). He justifies this claim by pointing out that it is possible to appreciate a benefactor's benevolent qualities without being moved to care for her in return (i.e. not being grateful to her) (ibid.). But this only shows that appreciation is not sufficient for gratitude—it could nevertheless be necessary. Manela also claims that gratitude *to* a benefactor is distinct from appreciating the benefit of there being an agent who intends to benefit us (ibid.). He justifies this claim by pointing out that having someone eager to benefit us is not always a benefit; for example, when the “benefactor” fails to be useful and causes more trouble instead (ibid.). Manela's example here misses the point again, because in targeted cases of gratitude one need not appreciate some actual benefit that the benefactor provides, but the benefactor's benevolence (goodwill) instead. Let us remind that Manela defined appreciation as “a mode of valuing... a certain kind of response to something good” (ibid. 289), which also includes *enjoying* the good. Contrary to Manela, I believe we could easily apply this notion of appreciation to targeted gratitude as well. In cases of gratitude *to* a benefactor, what the grateful person appreciates (recognizes, responds to, and *enjoys*) is the benefactor's benevolence (irrespective of what she succeeds to provide). This is more believable because it

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<sup>13</sup> Although, as this case is very similar to usual cases of targeted gratitude (because there clearly is a benefactor, the Reagan family) it might be argued that the appropriate end for Yoshi's gratitude is the Reagan family, not selfish regards, and that he should be inclined to benefit them (even if only propositionally grateful). This might be true, but nevertheless, propositional gratitude has some depth over mere appreciation, and the relevant point has been made. Furthermore, I believe targeted gratitude should have more importance in these types of situations. So, overall, Yoshi is still ungrateful.

makes sense to say that in targeted gratitude the beneficiary *must* appreciate something about the benefactor, because otherwise it is unclear why (or how) he is even grateful *to* her.

A better solution, however, is to abandon Manela's concept of appreciation. The two forms of gratitude are instead better understood as a stronger form of valuing. Valuing, in this sense, involves not only recognizing the value of something (i.e. appreciation) but also the subsequent care for what is perceived as valuable.<sup>14</sup> The two forms of gratitude are a special form of such valuing—valuing of the good that happens to oneself. Understanding the two forms of gratitude as a form of valuing which includes care for what is perceived as valuable is better, because it goes to the heart of gratitude and expresses its necessary conditions in a wholesome way. Firstly, gratitude involves recognizing the value of the good things that happen to oneself, which requires noticing one's dependence on outside influences, therefore establishing the connection with humility. Secondly, gratitude involves caring about the value, which gives rise to the distinct action tendency of preserving and promoting the benefit. This notion of valuing would become sufficient to be called gratitude, because it covers all of its necessary conditions.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, valuing appears in both forms of gratitude: in propositional gratitude, we value some lucky turn of events; in targeted gratitude, we value a benefactor's goodwill towards us. It is the focus of this valuing that specifies whether we are dealing with targeted or propositional gratitude.

Contrary to Manela, I have shown that propositional gratitude and targeted gratitude both involve an element of appreciation. Furthermore, they are united by something even stronger than appreciation. Namely, they are both constituted by the same form of valuing—valuing of the good things that happen to oneself. In this way, too, targeted and propositional gratitude share common ground. It should therefore not be an issue to call propositional gratitude “gratitude” equally to its targeted sibling.

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<sup>14</sup> After all, would it not be weird to say one “values“ something without having any care for it? This wider notion of valuing can also serve separately as an attitude towards various other things (e.g. one can value a painting by noticing its qualities and caring that the painting fares well (doesn't get damaged)).

<sup>15</sup> Even Manela's concept of appreciation fits under this notion of valuing, because this notion of valuing goes beyond Manela's concept of appreciation, without subtracting anything.

### 3 The Fundamental Form of Gratitude

In this section, I will deal with some of the implications and specifications of my theory. I will begin by showing that propositional gratitude is, in fact, more common than we might assume—even more common than the well-known targeted gratitude. What is interesting is that propositional gratitude is sometimes hidden from view, but there nonetheless. Firstly, I will show that each and every case of targeted gratitude is actually a special form of propositional gratitude. After that, I will deal with the opposite possibility, of propositional instances of gratitude being targeted instances of gratitude instead—through some form of anthropomorphism. I will show that this argument lacks merit and that everyday uses of gratitude towards states of affairs are quite normal, and do not presuppose any kind of anthropomorphism or cognitive dissonance.

#### 3.1 An overlap between the two forms of gratitude

Whether we are grateful *to* someone for something, or grateful *that* something is the case; we are in essence portraying the same type of attitude and emotion. The difference being that in targeted cases we have a special concern (the benefactor) and thus the gratitude is targeted at a human quality (the goodwill). However, this concern simply specifies and narrows the focus of gratitude (to its targeted form), but does not constitute the essence of gratitude in general. As I have already shown, it is not necessary to the idea of gratitude that it be always targeted at some benefactor. In fact, each case of targeted gratitude implicitly involves gratitude over some proposition. What is more basic then, is propositional gratitude. My being grateful *to* someone for something implies my being grateful *that* this something happened. This being the case, it is difficult to argue that targeted gratitude is a stand-alone attitude. Instead, this would give credibility to the fundamentality of propositional gratitude. However, some might argue that not all cases of targeted gratitude include propositional gratitude. Let us consider an example given by Tony Manela:

Yancy stumbles across Rachel, his former household servant. Out of compassion and care, she invites Yancy to a meal at her home with her family. Out of obligatory politeness, Yancy agrees, and has a miserable time. The food, while objectively nourishing, is terribly plain; and the appalling behavior of Rachel's commoner children is jarring. (2016: 282)

Manela tells us that Yancy, despite not enjoying the dinner, is grateful *to* Rachel for having him to dinner, because he was moved by Rachel's benevolence. Although, Manela says, Yancy is not grateful *that* Rachel invited him to dinner, because "he hated the experience and wished it had not happened" (ibid. 283). With this example, Manela urges us to believe that there can be cases of purely targeted gratitude, without the propositional element. "Yancy thus seems to be a beneficiary who is grateful *to* without being grateful *that*" (ibid.). On the surface, this might seem plausible. But if we look deeper, then it becomes evident that the content of propositional gratitude in this particular case is better captured not in terms of the dinner invitation but rather in terms of Rachel's goodwill. In this case, a more accurate formulation might be: Yancy is grateful *to* Rachel for being benevolent towards him. And in this case, we can also easily formulate the propositional sentence: Yancy is grateful *that* Rachel was benevolent towards him. Notice that both of these versions are equal in their content, because both of them share the same attitude which focuses on the same intentional object. In typical cases of gratitude *to* a benefactor, the beneficiary also feels propositional gratitude for some particular benefit (like a gift), but in all cases, there is propositional gratitude for the goodwill of the benefactor, which ultimately translates into targeted gratitude. Therefore, whenever we are grateful *to* someone, we are also grateful over something (some state of affairs)—that is to say, there are no cases of gratitude that are simply targeted at a benefactor for no apparent reason. Targeted gratitude, rather than being an essentially different attitude or emotion from propositional gratitude, is instead a special form of propositional gratitude—one which focuses on the benevolent qualities of a benefactor. All in all, if we are careful in specifying the exact object of our gratitude, I believe it is not a problem to say that each case of gratitude is based on a propositional form.

### **3.2 Gratitude, religion, and anthropomorphism**

One form of gratitude that can give us an interesting view of how people commonly practice gratitude is that of religious gratitude. The most common prayers, for example, are usually about giving thanks and praise to god, for whatever good happens. What is noteworthy, however, is that in religious context people seem to have a vastly greater number of reasons to feel grateful, because nearly everything that goes well can be interpreted as a gift from god; atheists, on the other hand, lack these options for gratitude—at least if we believe that gratitude is only intelligible in its targeted form.

The grateful theist, for example, might feel grateful *to* god because the weather outside is nice for her walk in the park. An atheist, however, could not formulate such gratitude *to* anyone, because in his worldview there are no beings with the power to bring about such states of affairs. Then, if gratitude is necessarily targeted, we could not say that the atheist feels a similar way about the weather outside as the theist. We would have to say that only the theist can feel gratitude for the weather and that the atheist feels something else, perhaps gladness. But I suspect that many people would share the intuition that the atheist can, nevertheless, feel grateful for most of the same things as the theist (except perhaps for god's mercy or so forth). Because, what is essential to gratitude is our perception of ourselves (or something/someone we care about) as being positively affected by some external influences.

However, one might argue that in propositional cases of gratitude there is some implicit personification of nature, fortune, or some other force, so that it is viewed as an intentional agent; and that our gratitude, though seemingly propositional, is in fact targeted to an anthropomorphised object. For example, when I am grateful *that* the rain has watered my crops, the critic would say that I have anthropomorphised nature so that I believe it is capable of intentionally providing me with benefits. And in this case, I would instead be holding targeted gratitude, similarly to the theist, although perhaps unknowingly.

One philosopher who has made a similar argument is Robert C. Roberts who has said that when an atheist claims to feel gratitude, what he really means is usually just gladness. Roberts adds that in those rare cases when we are indeed dealing with genuine gratitude, the theist would have to personify some nonpersonal cause (luck, fate, or the universe) and see it as wishing them well. He adds that if they do in fact know that these causes are not wishing them well, then their gratitude is irrational, though in a mild and harmless sort of way. (Roberts 2004: 63) I believe that this criticism is not accurate. It should be perfectly intelligible to construe oneself as being dependent upon external influences, without having an implicit belief or impression that these influences have been brought about by an intentional agent wishing us well.

My problem with the anthropomorphism/personification argument is that it fails to capture what people really mean when they say that they are grateful *that* something is the case. The anthropomorphism argument is simply a reductionist strategy that assigns some incoherent impressions or beliefs to the agent and hopes to push the burden of proof on the opponent's side. Of course, it is possible that some people might personify or anthropomorphise a nonpersonal cause when they feel gratitude. However, it is implausible to claim that most of the ordinary language users are committing a fallacy and do not understand what they are

talking about—that in one moment they understand their feelings, and that in another moment they do not. I have shown in multiple meaningful ways that gratitude is intelligible as a non-targeted emotion and attitude. Therefore, it begs the question to insist that many everyday uses of gratitude are based upon some form of self-deception or misunderstanding. I have shown that gratitude towards states of affairs is intelligible as a non-targeted emotion or attitude which requires no cognitive dissonance, self-deception, or anthropomorphism; and therefore, my solution better captures how we express gratitude and what we mean by it.

## 4 Conclusion

My mission in this thesis has been to show that gratitude can be felt not only towards other people but also towards states of affairs in general. I began by briefly defining several key aspects and related notions of gratitude which allowed me to continue with my arguments. I argued that both forms of gratitude (targeted and propositional) have enough in common to be regarded as essentially the same type of emotion and attitude. What they have in common is essential to the idea of gratitude and can separate it from other concepts. Firstly, the two forms of gratitude both require some humble recognition of one's partial dependence on some external circumstances. Secondly, the two forms of gratitude both share a similar action tendency (or response) in which the grateful person seeks to somehow preserve and promote the good that has come one's way. Thirdly, and most importantly, both forms of gratitude are a special form of valuing—valuing of the good that happens to oneself.

In the final chapter, I showed that gratitude towards states of affairs is, contrary to some beliefs, fairly common and even more fundamental than gratitude to other people. Gratitude towards states of affairs, rather than being dismissible as something other than real gratitude and worthy of the philosophical neglect it has received, is instead a foundation to all forms of gratitude and therefore an important topic for further research.

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## Tänuikkus asjaolude suhtes

Kui me räägime tänuikkusest, siis tavaliselt peame silmas seda head tunnet ja tänuavalduse soovi, mis meil tekib, kui keegi on meie vastu lahke või teeb meile heateo. Näiteks, kui ma unustan enda rahakoti poes kassasse ja keegi mulle järele jookseb ja selle ära toob, siis olen talle tänuik selle heateo eest. Sellise arusaama järgi on tänuikkus suunatud teistele inimestele nende heategude või hea tahte eest. Kuid vahel öeldakse ka, et ollakse tänuikud mingite asjaolude suhtes. Näiteks võib mõni öelda, et ta on tänuik, et väljas on kena ilm; või tänuik, et tal on elus vedanud. Filosoofilises kirjanduses on aga tugev üldine meeletatus, et asjaolude suhtes tänuik olla ei saa, sest see pole midagi enam kui rõõm või heameel millegi üle ja ei oma midagi ühist selle tänuga, mida tunneme heategijate suhtes.

Selles töös kaitsen ma seisukohta, et asjaolude suhtes saab tänu tunda küll. Ma näitan, et tänuikkus teistele inimestele ja tänuikkus asjaolude suhtes omavad ühiseid aluseid. Esiteks, mõlemad tänuikkuse vormid väljendavad tagasihoidlikkust, kuna tänuik inimene tunnistab enda sõltuvust välistest asjaoludest. Teiseks, mõlemad tänuikkuse vormid omavad sarnast käitumiskalduvust, mille kaudu tänuik inimene hoolib enda heategijast või heast olukorrast. Heategijast või heast olukorrast hoolimine väljendub selles, et mõlemas nähtud headust üritatakse hoida ja edendada. Lisaks väidan, et mõlemad tänu vormid on seletatavad kui eriline viis häid asju väärtustada. See eriline viis häid asju väärtustada nõuabki teatud tagasihoidlikkust ja selgitab ühtlasi miks tänuik inimene hoolib enda heategijast või heast olukorrast. Töö viimases osas näitan, et tänuikkus asjaolude suhtes on tänuikkuse põhivorm ja laialt levinud.

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