

## Developing gratitude: An introduction

By: [Jonathan R. H. Tudge](#) and Lia Beatriz de Lucca Freitas

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### **Abstract:**

Cicero (54 bc/2009) held that gratitude “is not only the greatest, but is also the parent of all the other virtues” (p. 80). For centuries philosophers (Hume, 1739–40/2007; Mather, 1732; Smith, 1759/2000) and writers (e.g., Dickens [1860–1861/1996], *Great Expectations*, and Shakespeare [1605/2005], *King Lear*) have seemed to agree with Cicero, at least considering gratitude as a virtue and treating ingratitude as a moral failing. Moreover, human beings are not alone in responding positively to those who have provided them with help (de Waal, 2006, 2010). Nonetheless, gratitude is clearly not something that is innate (Emmons & Shelton, 2002), and therefore, its development is worthy of study.

**Keywords:** developmental psychology | gratitude | children | adolescents

### **Chapter:**

Cicero (54 bc/2009) held that gratitude “is not only the greatest, but is also the parent of all the other virtues” (p. 80). For centuries philosophers (Hume, 1739–40/2007; Mather, 1732; Smith, 1759/2000) and writers (e.g., Dickens [1860–1861/1996], *Great Expectations*, and Shakespeare [1605/2005], *King Lear*) have seemed to agree with Cicero, at least considering gratitude as a virtue and treating ingratitude as a moral failing. Moreover, human beings are not alone in responding positively to those who have provided them with help (de Waal, 2006, 2010). Nonetheless, gratitude is clearly not something that is innate (Emmons & Shelton, 2002), and therefore, its development is worthy of study.

The prevailing view is that psychologists have only recently shown any interest in the topic (Elosúa, 2015; 2004; McConnell, 2016) and have done so only thanks to the growing field of positive psychology. This is not in fact the case; interest in gratitude as a developing

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phenomenon is far from recent, with early work on the topic being conducted by Baumgarten-Tramer (1938). Moreover, Piaget ([1954] 1981, [1965] 1995) suggested that gratitude appears during childhood and is an important aspect of moral development. Study of the “positive” aspects of human development has long been the provenance of developmental and moral psychology (see, for example, La Taille, Chapter 2, this volume). Nonetheless, it is true to say that even though gratitude has been studied much more by psychologists this century than at any earlier time, its development has not been a major focus of attention. Instead, perhaps under the influence of positive psychology, gratitude has been treated overwhelmingly as a positive emotion resulting from a wide array of occurrences, ranging from being given a nice gift, to seeing some beautiful art, to appreciating all that one has. Feeling this positive emotion is certainly to be welcomed; however, it is difficult to see why such an emotion should be termed the parent of all virtues. Equally, it is by no means easy to think that failing to feel a positive emotion can qualify as ingratitude or that a person who does not feel it in the face of a gift or art or good health could reasonably be accused of having a moral failing.

We therefore think that a volume on the development of gratitude is timely, and we have asked scholars from a variety of perspectives, disciplines, and parts of the world to contribute. The title of the book was deliberately chosen to be a little ambiguous; the word *developing* can be used in this context both as an adjective and as a gerund. Using it as an adjective, we are interested in how gratitude is understood and expressed during childhood and adolescence, as well as some possible effects of those understandings. Thus, Morgan and Gulliford (Chapter 4) show that adolescents are better able than children to judge benefactors’ motives. Mendonça and Palhares (Chapter 5) and Payir et al. (Chapter 6) suggest that older youth are more likely than their younger peers to express the type of gratitude that seems most likely to build or strengthen connections between people and to feel that there is a moral obligation to try to repay, if at all possible, their benefactors with something that may benefit the latter. In this sense of *developing* we are also interested in some of the possible sequelae of gratitude; for example, in terms of increased well-being or a diminished value placed on materialism (see Bausert and colleagues, Chapter 7, and Kiang et al., Chapter 8).

Using the word as a gerund, however, we are interested in what it is that the social world (parents, teachers, etc.) does to try to develop feelings and expressions of gratitude in children and adolescents. Parents want their children to learn to be grateful for the good things they get and to the people who provide them, sometimes trying to model grateful behavior, sometimes talking with their children about how and why to show gratitude, sometimes putting their children into settings in which they are more able to express their gratitude (see, for example, O’Brien et al., Chapter 9, Hussong and her colleagues, Chapter 10, and Ramsey, Gentzler, and Vizio, Chapter 11). Teachers, too, can play a large part in this endeavor to develop gratitude in youth, both in the course of their everyday interactions (Howells, Chapter 12) and by encouraging their students to read the type of literature that exemplifies some of the complexity involved in being grateful (Carr and Harrison, Chapter 13).

## **What Is Gratitude?**

Having parsed the meaning of the word *developing*, it is worth considering what we mean by its partner in our title, *gratitude*. At first blush, that might seem an easier task; gratitude has

attracted considerable interest since the turn of the 21st century. There are plenty of websites extolling the virtues of keeping a gratitude journal, of encouraging children to enumerate the things for which they feel grateful, of “counting one’s blessings,” and so on. The academic community, similarly, has taken increasing interest in the topic, with many studies suggesting that gratitude tends to correlate positively with various measures of well-being and that short-term interventions can increase levels of gratitude (for discussions of this research, see, for example, Froh & Bono, 2014; Watkins, 2014).

In both popular and academic parlance, however, the word “gratitude” seems to be used in a variety of ways. A young child is asked to say “thank you” for a gift that she has just received, and she duly obliges. A teen really appreciates the fact that his running shoes are more expensive and flashier looking than those of any of his friends, and says that he is grateful that he does not have to wear cheap-looking shoes. Two young adults see the full moon reflected in a lake and, overcome by the beauty of the night, say that they are truly grateful for the privilege of seeing such a sight. A student is given, by a relative she rarely sees, funds to allow her to attend the college of her dreams, and she promises to study as hard as she possibly can as a way of repaying her benefactor. A man, seeing a friend (someone who had recently greatly helped him) with a flat tire, immediately stops driving to help him change the tire. An elderly woman, living alone, is really thankful that she is still in good health. Are these different feelings, emotions, responses, and behaviors all examples of gratitude? At least some authors would say that they are: “Gratitude has been conceptualized as an emotion, a virtue, a moral sentiment, a motive, a coping response, a skill, and an attitude. It is all of these and more” (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000, p. 56). If one looks at the ways in which parents and children, at least those who are rather well educated and living in the United States, use the word, it certainly encompasses a very wide range of things (see Hussong et al., Chapter 10, and Ramsey et al., Chapter 11).

Our view is that gratitude needs to be carefully defined to avoid its being used to mean a variety of concepts that, although similar in some ways, are different enough to create conceptual confusion. In this, we agree with Roberts (2004), who wrote that “if we are going to have a science of something, we had better have a pretty clear idea what that thing is and be careful not to confuse it with other things that are a little bit like it” (p. 65). Gulliford, Morgan, and Kristjánsson (2013) also commented on the lack of conceptual clarity among scholars, particularly in psychology, who write about gratitude. Similarly Fagley (2016) noted that too often those who write about gratitude may be confusing it with a broader construct – that of appreciation.

The problem, in fact, may not be so much one of definition. Many scholars, from both philosophy and psychology, accept the same basic definition, one that consists of three parts (see, for example, Fagley, 2016; Gulliford et al., 2013; Kristjánsson, 2013; Roberts, 2004; Tudge, Freitas, & O'Brien, 2015). First, there should be a benefactor, one who freely and intentionally provides, or attempts to provide, some benefit to a beneficiary. Second, the beneficiary has to recognize and feel good about the benefactor's good intentions (but also notice when those intentions are not so good; when designed, for example, to humiliate rather than to help) and realize whether the benefit was provided freely rather than under duress (see also Morgan and Gulliford, Chapter 4). Third (although some definitions do not include this), the

beneficiary has to freely wish to repay the benefactor, if possible and when appropriate, with something deemed to be of value to the benefactor.

As other scholars (e.g., Carr and Harrison, Chapter 13; Manela, 2015) have noted, this is a “prepositional” approach to gratitude – gratitude *to* a benefactor. But even if there is general agreement on the definition, there are issues with the ways in which the concept has been operationalized in psychological research. Many of the items in the scales most widely used to assess “gratitude” have no relevance to this definition, given that they do not feature an intentional benefactor, let alone the desire to repay a good deed or gift. Instead, they seem far better suited to what has been termed (Carr and Harrison, Chapter 13; Manela, 2015) the “propositional” sense of gratitude (i.e., gratitude *for* the good things that happen to us). It is very difficult to disentangle this propositional sense of gratitude from other concepts, and in particular from various aspects of appreciation (Adler & Fagley, 2005; Fagley, 2016; Gulliford et al., 2013; Tudge, Freitas, & O'Brien, 2015).<sup>1</sup>

This conceptual confusion is reflected, for example, in the two main scales that have been used to assess gratitude, but which seem to have more to do with appreciation rather than gratitude as we have defined it. The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6), developed by McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002), appears to be the most widely used of these scales and includes items such as “I have so much in life to be thankful for” and “If I had to list everything I felt thankful for, it would be a very long list.” One of the items refers specifically to other people: “I am thankful to a wide variety of people.” However, neither this item nor any of the others involves any feeling of needing to repay in some way the people who were helpful. Similarly, neither of the other two widely used scales – the Gratitude, Resentment, Appreciation Test, short form (GRAT: Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003) and the Gratitude Adjective Checklist (GAC: McCullough et al., 2002) – include items involving the idea of wishing to repay benefactors; indeed, only four of the items in these last two scales (forming the Appreciation for Others subscale of the GRAT) relate to human benefactors.

Of course, one does not have to receive a benefit from a human benefactor to experience a positive emotion. You can heartily enjoy a good meal (without necessarily thinking about the person who prepared it), feel a sense of awe at moonlight reflecting from a snowy mountain peak (without any acknowledgment of the people who designed and constructed the transportation system that you used to get there), or enjoy the “high” after having been able to run five miles (without once thinking about any health professionals who have helped ensure that you are healthy enough to do that). But it is not clear to us why such an emotional response should be termed “gratitude.” Fagley (2016; Adler & Fagley, 2005) argues persuasively that appreciation is a far broader construct than that of gratitude, and we agree. If you are not appreciative of the meal, of the view, or of your good health, others might say that you are unappreciative, but they are unlikely to call you “ungrateful.”

What are the implications for taking seriously this three-part definition of gratitude? One is that it is something unlikely to be fully developed in adolescents, let alone children, if, as McConnell (Chapter 3) wrote, gratitude should only be expected from “full-fledged moral

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<sup>1</sup> The title of the 2014 book by Philip Watkins (*Gratitude and the Good Life: Toward a Psychology of Appreciation*) encapsulates the position that the two are essentially the same.

agents.” Gratitude, moreover, requires a level of sophisticated thinking that is unlikely to be found in children. To be grateful one has to recognize not only that others have different ways of seeing the world (and so, at a minimum, need to have a theory of mind) but also that people may behave in a similar way for a variety of reasons, and to be able to understand their intentions (see, for example, Morgan and Gulliford, Chapter 4). In terms of gratitude, it matters whether the benefit was provided freely (if the person were forced to provide it, gratitude is hardly due and might, in some circumstances, be more appropriate to the person providing the force). Similarly, what might appear to be a benefit that is being offered may in fact be viewed by the apparent benefactor as a means to humiliate or threaten the supposed beneficiary, in which case the latter has no reason to feel, or express, gratitude.

Further, the definition requires that one not only feels good about the benefactor's actions but also that one wishes to repay the benefactor, if at all possible, with something of interest to him or her. This requires not only an understanding of others' perspectives but also a desire, even a sense of moral obligation, to do something for the person who provided the benefit (see Mendonça & Palhares, Chapter 5). After all, if one has received significant benefit from a person and one has the opportunity to help that person later and ignores that opportunity for no important reason, one might well be thought of as ungrateful, no matter how happy one felt on receiving that benefit. In other words, the positive emotion felt on receiving some benefit may be a necessary, but clearly not a sufficient, indicator of gratitude.

If an individual generally responds in a way consistent with this definition, it would seem reasonable to call him or her a grateful person, someone who exhibits the virtue of gratitude – that is, someone who typically feels, thinks, and behaves gratefully. But how does this virtue arise? This question, of course, takes us back to the developmental issues raised earlier, the issues that are the focus of this book. What we need to do is trace the “humbler beginnings” (Tudge, Freitas, & O'Brien, 2015, p. 286) of gratitude back to early childhood.

### **Implications for How to Study Gratitude in Children**

Presumably, the most appropriate approach would be one in which children of different ages were provided something that was of real value to them (whether help or something more tangible), see how they immediately responded after receiving the benefit, and subsequently set up a situation in which the benefactors needed some help or other benefit that was, in principle at least, possible for the beneficiaries (the children) to provide. It would then be possible to discover whether the beneficiaries responded to their benefactors both immediately after the benefit and later when the benefactor needed something (see Hussong, 2016, for an example of such a study). Even if children did in fact respond with what might appear to be genuine gratitude, it would be necessary for the researcher to assess the thinking behind this reciprocation; if it were done to avoid punishment, for example, or simply to follow an order, this action would not constitute gratitude as it is defined.

There are, however, less expensive and time-consuming methods that could be used, and we have used several such methods. For example, children are asked to respond to vignettes in which the protagonist gains some significant benefit from a benefactor who subsequently needs help him- or herself (see Castro et al., 2011; Rava & Freitas, 2013; Mendonça and

Palhares, Chapter 5). As is also true of Hussong's (2016) study, the children still need to be questioned about their reasons for saying that the protagonist should help the benefactor. The vignettes are set up in such a way that it is clear both that the protagonist needed some benefit that the benefactor freely provided and that the protagonist has the opportunity, should he or she so choose, to provide some benefit to the original benefactor.

A second approach we have used, one that does not rely on all study participants responding to the same story about a protagonist's needs and opportunity to repay, is one in which children are simply asked about what it is that they themselves wish for and what they would do, should they have the opportunity, for the person who granted them that wish (see, for example, Freitas, Pieta, & Tudge, 2011; Payir et al., Chapter 6). One advantage of these two questions is that the second assesses gratitude immediately after the first has children think about the fulfillment of their "greatest wish." However, to judge how closely this open-ended response met the requirements of the definition of gratitude would also need follow-up questions to understand the thinking behind any expressed desire to positively reciprocate following the granting of the wish.

A third approach we have used is simply to have children respond to items on a scale. Unlike the scale items of the GQ-6, GRAT, and GAC mentioned earlier, these items require study participants to respond to questions about how grateful they feel toward individuals who have benefited them in particular ways (see O'Brien et al., Chapter 9). For example, a question such as "Do people help you get the things you want?" is followed by "Do you feel thankful to the people who help you get those things?" Participants respond on a 5-point scale from "never" to "always" (Gratitude Assessment Questionnaire, Freitas & Tudge, 2010). This approach, unlike that used by other scales, specifically links the expression of gratitude for help given to the assessment of the extent to which this type of help is often provided.

One problem with each of these last three approaches, of course, is that they do not provide any information on behavioral responses – one can feel grateful, or even say that one would respond in a certain way, without ever actually behaving in a grateful way. However, each of these ways of collecting data about gratitude is an improvement on the more widely used scales, at least from the point of view that they link expressions of gratitude *to* particular individuals who have provided a benefit, as opposed to the more free-floating expressions of gratitude (or appreciation) *for* seeing beautiful sunsets or *for* feeling thankful for one's life – emotional states that have nothing to do with a sense of moral obligation to repay for benefits freely provided by an intentional other.

There are other approaches to studying gratitude to others for perceived benefits that they provided. The best known, and closest to fitting within our conception of the term, is the gratitude intervention that involves individuals writing letters expressing gratitude to those who have helped them in some significant way (Froh et al., 2014; Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, & Miller, 2009; see also Bausert et al., Chapter 7).

## **Gratitude, Developing**

It is difficult to argue that humans are born grateful (Emmons & Shelton, 2002), although human beings seem inherently social and cooperative. Even nonhuman primates have been seen to

behave in ways suggestive of humbler forms of gratitude in certain circumstances (de Waal, 2006, 2010; Warneken & Tomasello, 2009), and by the age of 2, children show themselves willing to help others when it is clear what can be done to help (Carlo, 2014; Killen & Smetana, 2015; Narvaez, 2015; Thompson, 2015). Prosocial tendencies, in fact, appear to grow stronger during the preschool years, at least when parents are more likely to be supportive and encouraging of their children's autonomy than when their child-rearing practices typically involve control and requiring obedience (Carlo, 2014). As La Taille (Chapter 2) notes, the trust that young children feel for their parents may play an important role in their developing a moral sense.

Even very young children can be taught to say “thank you” following receipt of a gift (Visser, 2009), although learning the norms of politeness should hardly be considered compelling evidence of the expression of gratitude (Freitas et al., 2011; Froh, Bono, & Emmons, 2010). There is evidence, however, that at least by the age of 5, those children who have shown some development of a theory of mind are capable, in principle at least, of understanding some of the key components involved in being grateful – not only feeling happy for the benefit received but also tying that positive feeling to the benefactor and recognizing that the benefactor acted intentionally. Nelson et al. (2013) found that 4-year-olds’ knowledge of mental states mediated the relation between understanding emotions at age 3 and understanding aspects of gratitude at age 5.

Freitas and her colleagues (Castro et al., 2011; Rava & Freitas, 2013), studying children aged from 5 to 12 years in southern Brazil, used vignettes telling a story about a benefactor who provided significant help to a child (the beneficiary) and who subsequently needed help. Most of the children recognized that the beneficiary felt good about being helped and about the benefactor's actions, but did not value the benefactor him- or herself. Moreover, when children felt that the beneficiary should help the benefactor, they differed in their explanations why. Most of the 5- to 6-year-olds focused on the consequences to the benefactor; returning a favor to avoid a negative judgment was the most common explanation given by children aged 7 and older; returning a favor as an autonomous moral obligation appeared solely among some of the 11- to 12-year-olds (see Mendonça and Palhares, Chapter 5, for similar work conducted in the United States).

Further evidence of the fact that gratitude is developing during childhood and adolescence was provided by the author of the first empirical study conducted on the development of gratitude, Baumgarten-Tramer (1938). Her approach was to try to assess whether and how children might express their gratitude to a benefactor who had provided them something of significance. She therefore initially asked the thousand Swiss 7- to 15-year-old participants in her study to write their greatest wish and then to write what they would do for the person who granted that wish. She found that the large majority of children responded to the second question with three main types of responses, responses that she labeled verbal, concrete, and connective gratitude. She provided limited statistical evidence (only some percentages) to support her findings and stated that there was no great change with age in the expression of verbal gratitude – that is, saying “thank you” or “I would be very grateful” to the benefactor. She noted that many of her participants felt that they should provide some benefit to their benefactor, but found a clear decline with age in concrete gratitude (that is, providing some benefit likely to be of interest to

the child but not necessarily to the benefactor) and a clear increase with age in connective gratitude (taking into account the benefactor's wishes or needs when considering how best to repay). Two recent replications of her study, one in Brazil (Freitas et al., 2011) and one in the United States (Tudge, Freitas, Mokrova, Wang, & O'Brien, 2015), provided similar results (more recent results from a wider variety of countries are reported by Payir et al., Chapter 6).

There is at least some evidence, therefore, for the development of both the prosocial precursors of gratitude and a type of gratitude itself. Connective gratitude, after all, involves at least some of the key components of gratitude as we have defined it. Like concrete gratitude, it encompasses the idea that some significant help or gift should be repaid, but only connective gratitude includes the view that the repayment should be something of help or interest to the benefactor. Of course, it is not enough to simply say that one would respond in one or other way to show that one is a grateful individual – actions speak louder than words! But at least expressing connective gratitude is a necessary, albeit far from sufficient, marker of gratitude as we have defined it.

### **Developing Gratitude**

The question then arises as to what it is that others do to encourage the development of gratitude. As noted earlier, children's prosocial behavior may be rooted in our species, but its development can be encouraged or discouraged by how children are parented and thus, by extension, in the course of their relationships with the social world in general – with siblings, friends, teachers, books and the media, and, in sum, the culture of which they are a part.

Elsewhere (Tudge, Freitas, & O'Brien, 2015), we have argued that given our definition of gratitude it is worth considering it a virtue. Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists such as Annas (2011) view a virtue as a persisting and reliable disposition to feel, think, and act in a virtuous way. If individuals, after having received significant help or other benefit, typically feel grateful, think about how they might repay a freely chosen debt of gratitude, and act in such a way as to benefit their former benefactors, they surely are extolling the virtue of gratitude. Simply feeling a positive emotion is clearly not enough – only feeling happy (or even feeling virtuous) without behaving accordingly if the opportunity presents itself would not qualify someone as having the virtue of gratitude.

For Annas (2011) and other neo-Aristotelians, the path to becoming virtuous is not an easy one; it involves time, experience, and encouragement from those who already know something about virtuous behavior. In other words, children are not born virtuous, but may become virtuous by learning what it means to behave virtuously and then acting accordingly. From a developmental perspective, children start learning to be grateful via the everyday activities and interactions in which they participate with family, friends, and other important social partners. Depending on the culture in which they are raised, children may be encouraged from an early age to say “thank you” for a present or help. What undoubtedly starts as learning the relevant social norms of politeness may develop, with help and encouragement, into the idea that it is nice to help those who have helped us or to give a birthday gift to those who have given us a gift. In some families, children may be prompted to thank benefactors for the nice gift; in other families, children might be encouraged to think about the kindness of the person providing the gift (for more details, see O'Brien et al., Chapter 9, Hussong et al., Chapter 10, and Ramsey et al., Chapter 11).

For neo-Aristotelians, the concept of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) is crucial for the development of virtue; in fact, the two go hand in hand (Kristjánsson, 2007). A lot of experience – plus the ability to and interest in reflecting on that experience – is required to gain this type of wisdom (Annas, 2011). Fortunately, children, as they develop, may have the opportunity to observe when (or whether) other people thank them (or others) for their acts of kindness, to see what happens when people fail to respond gratefully, and to learn about others' intentional and non-intentional acts and when gratitude is required (or not required).

Given the theoretical framework that we have found helpful (see Tudge, 2008; Tudge, Freitas, & O'Brien, 2015), it is also crucial to consider the important role played by children's own individual characteristics. First and foremost, their socioemotional, cognitive, and moral development has to be such that they not only understand others' intentionality and others' desires and needs but also are capable of behaving morally. Children who have developed to be less empathic may be less likely to become grateful as we have defined it than are those who genuinely care for others. Similarly, an egocentric response to a kind act might involve reciprocity to the benefactor, but not take into account his or her wishes or needs. And children might be willing to reciprocate but only because they have been told what to do (heteronomous obligation), rather than doing so because they feel it is the good thing to do (an autonomous moral obligation).

How do children develop greater empathy or care? As mentioned before, children very early in life seem disposed to help others if it is clear how they are to do that (Killen & Smetana, 2015; Narvaez, 2015; Thompson, 2015; Warneken & Tomasello, 2009), and prosocial feelings and behaviors are more likely to develop when parents are supportive rather than controlling of their children (Carlo, 2014). In other words, it is impossible to separate out the effects of either context or individual characteristics – development is an emergent property arising out of the synergistic interplay of both context and the individuals within it (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

But although interactions with parents and other caregivers are undoubtedly relevant, so too are broader culture-wide sets of values and beliefs. Relying on the more traditional manner of examining parental values across cultures (Hofstede, 2011; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 2001), one might say that parents in collectivist or interdependent cultures would be more likely to encourage their children to think about others than would parents in individualistic or independent cultures. The same type of argument could be made using the more sophisticated models of Kağıtçıbaşı (2007, 2012) and Keller (2012). Kağıtçıbaşı, for example, has argued that it is more appropriate to use a two-dimensional orthogonal model, with one dimension (agency) ranging from autonomy to heteronomy and the second dimension (interpersonal distance) ranging from separate to related. Such an approach yields four quadrants, and she argues that societies and cultural groups within societies fit into one or another of these four quadrants. The United States thus may be said to fit into the autonomy-separate quadrant, rural and poorly educated groups in Turkey fit into the heteronomy-related quadrant, and urban and well-educated groups in Turkey belong in the autonomy-related quadrant (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005). Time also clearly plays a role in Kağıtçıbaşı's ideas – as her work with Ataca strongly suggests, as

groups move to urban centers and their offspring get a better education, there is a move from heteronomy-relatedness values to those of autonomy-relatedness.

These values are, of course, passed on from adults to children (in some form or other) in the course of typically occurring activities and interactions that children have with their parents and with others (see Tudge, 2008). At the same time, specific psychological characteristics of the children and of their parents influence the ways in which those activities and interactions develop. As a result, values are never “transmitted” to their children; any attempts to pass on parental values are always likely to be modified in the course of their interactions because of the particular characteristics of the interacting individuals, the local context in which those interactions are taking place, and the broader cultural context. As Bronfenbrenner (2001; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) argued so persuasively, to understand development one has to pay attention to the synergistic interweaving of these typically occurring activities and interactions (that he termed “proximal processes”), the personal characteristics of the individuals involved in them, the context (both local and cultural) in which those activities and interactions occur, and time (both ontogenetic and historical). To understand the development of gratitude as a virtue requires that we pay attention to each of these mutually influencing concepts.

## **An Overview of the Volume**

Gratitude is clearly a complex phenomenon, and the contributors to this volume illuminate the concept from a variety of different angles. The first part sets the scene by focusing on its complexity from psychological and philosophical points of view. In Part II, the authors examine the ways in which gratitude develops over childhood and adolescence, as well as some of the influences on and sequelae to its development. The third part includes chapters that examine the ways in which adults try to develop gratitude in their children, both at home and in school.

### **Part I: Setting the Scene**

Chapter 2, contributed by Yves de La Taille, deals with a question that is fundamental to this volume: Is gratitude, as well as the other virtues, an appropriate subject for study by psychologists, and does it fit within the realm of moral psychology? To answer this question, La Taille critiques the long-standing notion that justice is the sole, or at least the primary, domain of interest for moral psychologists. He argues, convincingly in our opinion, that not only the “other-regarding” virtues (such as gratitude and generosity) but also those that are self-regarding (such as courage and humility) fit clearly within moral psychology and often are necessary for moral action. Moreover, he hypothesizes that these virtues, at least in their incipient forms, play an important role in the development of morality.

It is not surprising that Terrance McConnell's view of gratitude, expressed in Chapter 3, matches well the three-part definition with which we work, because his book on this topic (McConnell, 1993) was influential in our initial thinking and on the first measures that we designed or adapted to study gratitude. In this chapter, his primary focus is on gratitude involving the “special relationship” of parents and their children. He deals with the complex issue of the gratitude that children might be expected to feel toward their parents – whether, in fact, any gratitude needs to be felt – and then what the children's moral requirements might be.

For the most part, he considers parents and their adult children, given that only adults can be considered to be “full-fledged moral agents” who can be expected both to understand the ramifications of gratitude and whether and when to repay a benefit received from another. However, he also considers how children might become moral agents and the possible roles played by parents in encouraging their children to express gratitude.

The two central questions with which he grapples are as follows. First, when, if ever, do adult children owe their parents gratitude? Second, if gratitude is owed, what are adult children required to do? The answers to neither question are simple, in part because the literature (whether philosophical, psychological, or anthropological) provides a variety of answers and in part because the parent–child relationship cannot be easily separated from other relationships (e.g., friend, employee, competitor) that adult children can have with their parents. Each relationship has its own set of obligations, sometimes overlapping, sometimes in opposition. Adult children also have competing moral obligations – to their spouses, their children, their community, their co-workers, and so on.

## Part II: Gratitude, Developing

Blaire Morgan and Liz Gulliford (Chapter 4) begin by noting the complexities inherent in studying gratitude as a virtue and describe the methods that they have used in both the United Kingdom and Australia to understand how children (aged 8 to 11), adolescents (11 to 18), and adults deal with these complexities. They asked adolescents and adults to respond to vignettes that varied in such a way as to allow an assessment of their views about such matters as the relation of gratitude to duty, the cost or effort required of benefactors, the beneficiary's perceived benefit, and benefactors' ulterior or malicious motives for conferring a supposed benefit. Although Morgan and Gulliford found some cross-cultural differences, they note that the adolescents were able to judge the benefactors' motives and were actually more likely than adults to say that gratitude should be expressed to a benefactor who attempted to provide some benefit, even when that benefit was either not gained or not deemed valuable. Younger children, aged 8 to 11, were less able to understand these complexities, however. Reading stories in a workbook format, English and Australian children found it difficult to take into account benefactors' ulterior motives. As the authors note, the virtue of gratitude is not a simple phenomenon; its development is likely to take experience, encouragement, and explanation from adults, as well as understanding on the part of children themselves, for it to be fully realized.

Sara Mendonça and Fernanda Palhares, in Chapter 5, like Morgan and Gulliford (Chapter 4), define gratitude as a virtue and discuss children's and adolescents' responses to vignettes used in the Developing Gratitude Research Project (DGRP). Given their conceptualization of gratitude as a moral virtue, they raise the question about its connection to moral obligation. As Mendonça and Palhares point out, some scholars hold that obligation runs counter to gratitude, but they argue here that one must distinguish between heteronomous and autonomous obligation. This distinction, drawn from Piaget, reveals that freely taking on a moral obligation to reciprocate a benefactor for some benefit is an essential, and not a peripheral, aspect of gratitude as a moral virtue. The authors draw on data from 7- to 14-year-olds who are read vignettes and asked to explain how and, most importantly, why the protagonists should react when their benefactor subsequently needed help. They show that there seems to be a change from a willingness to help

based on possible consequences to the benefactor if not helped, at age 7, to a sense of obligation to help felt by older children. However, for some children this obligation is heteronomous (they talk about the social pressures to help), whereas for others it is autonomous – they feel it is the right thing to do. Mendonça and Palhares conclude by discussing some potential underlying constructs, such as empathy, sympathy, and prosocial reasoning, that could influence these variations.

The issue of cultural influences on the development of gratitude is the subject of Chapter 6 by Ayse Payir and her colleagues. They also use data from the DGRP, but rather than the vignettes, they use responses to the Wishes and Gratitude Survey (WAGS) collected from children and young adolescents in five countries (the United States, Brazil, Russia, China, and Turkey) to ask two main questions. First, can one see age-related changes in the expression of types of gratitude, and second, if such changes are found, to what extent do they vary based on culture? Payir et al. note that only a small percentage of the world's population of children is found in countries described as WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010), although the vast majority of published research is conducted with those children. It is therefore well worth considering whether there is any basis in the widespread implicit generalization from WEIRD samples to discussion of “children” or “adolescents” (Arnett, 2008). What Payir and her colleagues find is that there is a general tendency for younger children to express more “concrete gratitude” than do older children, but that the latter tend to express “connective gratitude” to a greater degree. However, they discover a good deal of culture-wide variation and plenty of reason not to engage in implicit generalization based on North American findings.

In the next two chapters authors turn to some of the correlates of youth gratitude. In Chapter 7, Samantha Bausert and colleagues first provide an overview of research dealing with some of these correlates, including both positive effects and the inverse relation between materialism and gratitude. They discuss studies that suggest that adolescents who subscribe to materialistic values are less likely to score high on gratitude scales and also note the positive relation between connective gratitude and other-related wishes (see Kiang et al., Chapter 8, for more details). Bausert and colleagues then provide details of a longitudinal study examining gratitude's links with both prosocial and antisocial behavior. Specifically, they argue that there are reciprocal effects: Prosocial behavior both predicted increases in gratitude and was predicted by gratitude, whereas the reciprocal effects of gratitude and antisocial behavior were negative – antisocial behavior both was predicted by and predicted lower gratitude. The authors also discuss several of the important intervention studies conducted with youth, ranging from those involving letter writing to those involving gratitude curricula in schools. As they point out, not all interventions show clear-cut effects, and they describe several of the possible moderating factors that may well be necessary to take into account when considering gratitude interventions. Bausert et al. conclude by suggesting that interventions might work better when integrated within the “Positive Education” movement; this broader approach to the development of gratitude relates to the final two chapters in this volume, by Howells (Chapter 12) and Carr and Harrison (Chapter 13).

Lisa Kiang and colleagues (Chapter 8) draw on three theoretical perspectives (Piaget, Schwartz's value theory, and Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory) to examine the links between gratitude and materialism in children and adolescents. Discussing some of the same research

reviewed in Chapter 7, they suggest that developing gratitude may strengthen social relationships, which then help moderate the negative effects of materialism on developmental outcomes. However, as they point out, age, gender, and social class also are likely to be influential. Using data from the Developing Gratitude Research Project (DGRP), Kiang et al. examine the position that gratitude and materialism fall within opposing value systems.

### Part III: Developing Gratitude

The final section of the volume deals with the ways in which gratitude is developed in conjunction with adults. Lia O'Brien and her colleagues, in Chapter 9, provide an overview of the ways in which gratitude has been conceptualized and operationalized in research before explaining why a neo-Aristotelian approach to gratitude as a moral virtue has implications for examining the parental role in the development of gratitude in children and adolescents. (For an alternative perspective on this, see McConnell, Chapter 3.) Drawing on Overton's relational developmental systems metatheory, O'Brien et al. discuss the ways in which parents may model and encourage the expression of gratitude while at the same time being influenced by their own children's behavior. Using data from the DGRP, O'Brien and her colleagues show that the links between parental and child gratitude are by no means simple. Parents' own gratitude was not directly related to that of their children, but was related to how much help their children felt that they received, which in turn was related to the children's level of gratitude.

In Chapter 10, Andrea Hussong and her colleagues first describe the ways in which parents think about gratitude: Drawing on earlier work from their Raising Grateful Children (RGC) project, they show that parents' conceptions of gratitude fit well with those commonly used by positive psychologists interested in gratitude (see also Ramsey et al., Chapter 11). For most of their chapter, however, Hussong et al. focus on the types of strategies that parents commonly use to try to encourage a sense of gratitude in their children. For example, using data from the RGC project, they show the ways in which parents model the expression of gratitude, engage in gratitude-relevant discussion with their children, react to the ways in which their children either express gratitude or (quite commonly) fail to do so particularly when expressing entitlement, and arrange experiences in the course of which children might be likely to feel and express gratitude. As is the case for the chapters by O'Brien et al. (Chapter 9) and Ramsey and her colleagues (Chapter 11), Hussong et al. also provide evidence for the links between parent behavior and child gratitude.

In Chapter 11, Meagan Ramsey, Amy Gentzler, and Boglarka Vizi take further the examination of how parents and their children conceptualize gratitude, interviewing not only mothers but also the children themselves. They report on two studies, in one of which they provide information on the content of mother-child conversations about gratitude. In the second study mothers (and also two fathers and one custodial grandmother) and children responded separately to the same questions. What Ramsey and her colleagues show is that there are significant relationships between the mothers and children in their samples in terms of some of the "sources" of gratitude – that is, those things for which they say they are grateful. Most of these sources fall into what we earlier in this chapter termed the "grateful for" category – whether for material things, the necessities of life, opportunities, health and well-being, or for friends and family.

Kerry Howells, in Chapter 12, switches our attention from parents to teachers, recommending that the latter both practice gratitude in their own lives and in the ways in which they treat their students. The latter also need to be encouraged to feel and express gratitude. In similar fashion to Hussong and her colleagues (Chapter 10) and Ramsey et al. (Chapter 11), who also are interested in lay conceptions of gratitude, Howells is cautious about privileging researchers' definitions of gratitude above those of teachers and students – teachers' and students' understandings being derived from their own “authentic” gratitude found within. In some cases, she argues, teachers come into the profession already living gratitude; in other cases it might require developing. However, as Howells notes, the situation is complex; trying to cultivate gratitude either in oneself or in one's students requires that one deal with a variety of feelings, some of which are likely to be at cross-purposes. What is needed, she argues, is for teachers to develop “gratitude practice,” involving three interrelated features. The first is what she terms a “state of preparedness,” or being prepared to feel gratitude for what teaching will bring on a daily basis; the second is recognizing what others have done for us and expressing our gratitude; and the third is attempting to eliminate from one's emotional repertoire the opposite of gratitude toward others – resentment.

Finally, in Chapter 13, David Carr and Tom Harrison return to several of the issues that we raise in this introductory chapter and that are also discussed by La Taille (Chapter 2) and McConnell (Chapter 3). Their central thesis is that literature, particularly classics of English literature – they draw, for example, on Shakespeare, Milton, Austen, and Dickens – and African American literature (using examples from Baldwin and Wright), can be used to help educate children not only to be grateful but also to be aware of the complexities of what gratitude entails. Most of their chapter deals with those complexities, noting the way that good literature, as opposed to what is found online via a quick Google search for “gratitude,” does not simply imply that gratitude is either easy or unfailingly positive.

Carr and Harrison raise questions about whether gratitude can be considered a moral virtue, whether it should be expressed to those whose contributions derive from sources that are themselves immoral or to those who stand to gain themselves from actions that by chance benefit others, and so on. Their case is that, if gratitude is to be taught, it should be taught in such a way that pupils are encouraged to exercise it with “intelligence, discernment, and discrimination.” Good literature that deals with moral complexities can certainly help in this encouragement.

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