An Empirical Exploration of the Normative Dimensions of Gratitude

Liz Gulliford and Blaire Morgan, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham, UK

1. Introduction

This volume attests that the topic of gratitude has been gaining considerable academic ground recently. It has been the subject of lively debate in philosophical and psychological circles and enthusiasm for the topic shows no sign of waning. However, while there has been an appetite for interdisciplinary dialogue about gratitude within academia, there has been relatively scant examination of lay understandings of gratitude. Thus, whilst we have witnessed debate from eminent philosophers and psychologists as to how gratitude should be defined and understood, we have seen comparatively little assessment of laypeople's conceptions of gratitude and how lay understandings ultimately compare with those of 'experts', be they psychologists or philosophers.

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues' 'Attitude for Gratitude' research project sought to remedy this lacuna by canvassing the views of laypeople across a range of demographic variables, in a series of inter-related studies. We have examined whether features laypeople associate with gratitude resonate with terms used in definitions offered by philosophers and psychologists, and if the conditions on gratitude stipulated by these experts have traction in the real world. For example, do laypeople believe gratitude to be entirely positive? Do they think gratitude *necessarily* involves a benefactor going above and beyond the call of duty? Does gratitude rely on benign intentions or might it be experienced 'accidentally', 'fortuitously' or when an ulterior motive- or even malicious intention- lay behind another's actions?

Psychologists' operational definitions influence the measures they create. We think it is important to examine whether the terms used in gratitude measures actually reflect lay understanding, for if they do not they cannot be said to offer truly valid assessments with real-world traction. To begin to elucidate this question, we conducted a prototype analysis of gratitude in the UK (Morgan, Gulliford & Kristjánsson, 2014) which we review below. Far from being perceived as an unambiguously positive concept, our UK sample associated gratitude with both positive and negative features. Furthermore, we found little support for the view that gratitude is characterised by awe or wonder, as some have suggested (Emmons & Shelton, 2002).

We are concerned that measures of gratitude which include items about its purported features may 'construct' gratitude in a way that is at odds with the experience of most people. Respondents may indicate a degree of assent to an item about, say, wonder, which they may have never hitherto

considered a feature of gratitude. Scores on this putative 'dimension' may thus turn out to be an artefact of the researcher's a priori thinking, rather than genuinely representing what *most* people understand by gratitude. We argue that empirical research into what laypeople understand by gratitude is an important first step towards circumscribing the concept. If 'experts', (philosophers or psychologists) want to stipulate certain features, dimensions or conceptual conditions of gratitude that do not emerge in lay understanding, we believe they must give a plausible account of why they diverge from the majority lay view (see Section 5).

In relation to *conditions* in which gratitude is experienced, we first undertook a review of the philosophical and psychological literatures on the topic (see Gulliford, Morgan & Kristjánsson, 2013). This revealed numerous conceptual controversies within and across 'expert' interdisciplinary borders. For instance, some philosophers (*and* some psychologists) either explicitly held (e.g. Roberts, 2004) or implied (e.g., Emmons, 2004) that gratitude necessarily involves going above and beyond duty[1], while others believed gratitude was not subject to this supererogation condition (e.g., McConnell, 1993). Debate centred on whether gratitude necessarily involves a benefactor (e.g. Roberts, 2004) or whether a person could be grateful for some benefit *without* attributing this to a particular agent.

Having uncovered a number of these conceptual controversies (see Gulliford et al., 2013) we developed two methods to examine how gratitude is understood by laypeople and what factors influence when, and to what degree, gratitude is experienced. With a specially designed vignette questionnaire, we manipulated conceptual controversies we had identified to see what factors laypeople believed would most impact their experience of gratitude. We assessed children's understanding of these factors by examining their responses in a gratitude story workbook we designed. Whilst the stories did not map the conceptual controversies rehearsed in the vignettes *exactly*, we were able to make some informed cross-generational comparisons which could be compared with the opinions of 'experts'- the 'necessary and sufficient conditions' of philosophers, and theories about attributions of gratitude in psychology (e.g. Wood et al. 2008).

We are committed to the position that the thinking of the 'Wise' (academic experts) should be complemented with that of the 'Many' (laypeople), to represent the concept of gratitude as accurately and comprehensively as possible. We hope this chapter will illustrate why gratitude requires elucidation from both these camps, and demonstrates that a lay conception of gratitude is crucial to avoid a limited or 'theoretically superimposed' understanding of the concept.

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[1] 'At the cornerstone of gratitude is the notion of *undeserved merit*. The grateful person recognizes that she did nothing to deserve the gift or benefit' (Emmons, 2004, p. 5)

We proceed by demonstrating how we have shed light on the understudied topic of lay understandings of gratitude with our prototype analysis (Section 2); vignette questionnaire (Section 3) and gratitude stories (Section 4). The stories were written with the goal of tapping children's understanding of factors influencing gratitude, however they might also fulfil an *educational* role in enabling children to reflect on when gratitude is appropriate (see Morgan, Gulliford and Carr, 2015). In Section 5 we rehearse potential objections to our methods and to the viability of the conclusions we draw from them. We close by inviting other researchers to share our approach; one which takes conceptual analysis out of the armchair into the increasingly popular world of empirically informed philosophy (Buckwalter, 2010; Knobe and Prinz, 2008).

2. Examining Features and Characteristics Laypeople Associate with the Concept of Gratitude in a Prototype Analysis

Prototype analysis is a method of conceptual enquiry which can be used to shed light on the features and characteristics laypeople associate with a concept and which of those features are deemed most important or central to that concept. It has been used to elucidate, for example, the nature of emotion (Fehr and Russell, 1984), love (Fehr and Russell, 1991), and forgiveness (Kearns and Fincham, 2004). We conducted a prototype analysis of gratitude with a UK sample (Morgan et al., 2014) which we compared with the findings of Lambert, Graham and Fincham's (2009) prototype analysis of gratitude in the USA. We summarise our method and findings below.

In the first stage of a prototype analysis participants write down features (actions, feelings, determinants, consequences) they believe are typical of the concept under consideration. They assign a valence (positive/negative) to each feature identified using a Likert scale. This enables researchers to examine whether the concept is perceived as largely positive, negative or neutral.

108 students from the University of Birmingham (UK) participated in Study 1, noting down features and characteristics they believed exemplify gratitude, along with their associated valence score (1= very negative to 5 = very positive). 63 key features emerged with a mean valance of 4.29 (SD= 0.70). However, a number of features (obligation, indebtedness, embarrassed and awkward) were rated as negative in valence. Furthermore, some negative features were *uniquely* associated with gratitude in the UK (e.g. guilt, embarrassed/awkward). Interestingly, none of our UK participants or Lambert et al.'s (2009) US participants, referred to 'wonder' as a feature of gratitude, despite Emmons and Shelton's (2002) depiction of gratitude encompassing 'a felt sense of wonder'. This is 'a clear case where definitions of gratitude do not map onto the layperson's conceptions' (Morgan et al. 2014, p. 11).

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The second step of a prototype analysis examines which key features are deemed most *central* to the concept under consideration. Different participants rate the key features on a Likert scale, enabling a 'nucleus' of central concept features to be established around which relatively peripheral concept features can be identified.

97 University of Birmingham students rated the 63 key gratitude features from Study 1 (1 = not at all central to 8 = extremely central). Results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between most frequently named features in Study 1 and their assigned centrality in Study 2 (r= .43, p <.001), and that more *central* gratitude features tended to be more positive in valence (r = .59, p <.001). However, the correlation between positive valence and centrality was weaker than Lambert et al. (2009) found in the USA (r = .84, p < .001). This finding, along with the incidence of unique negative gratitude features in the UK, suggests gratitude may not be perceived to be as positive a concept in the UK as it is in the USA.[2] This may also speak to 'expert' understandings of gratitude which, in psychology particularly, have largely characterised gratitude as a *positive* emotion or trait.

Centrality ratings were combined with frequency ratings (Study 1) to create a *combined rank* which was used to corroborate the prototypical structure of gratitude in Study 3. To demonstrate that a concept has a prototypical structure it must be shown that feature centrality influences cognition involving the concept (e.g. recall memory, recognition memory, reaction time). In a third study (50 students), we showed that fictitious characters demonstrating more central features of gratitude (assessed with the combined rank) were deemed more grateful than those demonstrating peripheral, marginal or remote features, thereby corroborating gratitude's prototypical structure. As the findings of Study 3 are less salient for present purposes, interested parties should consult Morgan et al. (2014).

Prototype analysis offers a way into examining lay understanding of concepts, which in some respects may differ from 'expert' understandings. While philosophers may distinguish between concepts to refine or reclaim what they regard as their 'true' meaning, it might be argued that they should hold no privileged place when it comes to defining the terms of language *as it is actually used* (see Gulliford, 2015 in press). We suggest that the conceptual understanding of gratitude be enriched by empirical research which canvasses the opinions of the 'Many' as well as the 'Wise'.

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[2] For comparison purposes both studies were conducted with university students. To examine whether these findings extend to the general population, the study would need to be replicated with larger samples representing different demographic groups in the USA and UK.

To that end we now move to a further study, which examined how laypeople conceptualise gratitude by identifying what conditions (if any) laypeople place on when gratitude *is-* and *should be-* experienced.

3. Examining Laypeople's Understanding of Gratitude with a Vignette Questionnaire

The goal of our vignette questionnaire was to see whether the conditions on gratitude stipulated by philosophers and psychologists (Gulliford et al., 2013) have traction in the real world. We sought to examine empirically the following conceptual controversies surrounding gratitude:

- *Cost (or risk) to the benefactor:* To experience gratitude must the benefaction be costly to the benefactor (i.e., take a lot of effort/risk to bestow)?
- *Value of the benefit:* Must the benefit always be of value to the recipient in order for them to be grateful?
- *Duty/Supererogation:* Must gratitude involve someone going above and beyond the call of duty (be more than should be expected by them fulfilling the requirements of their job)?
- *Non-realised benefit:* Does the benefit have to materialise for gratitude to be experienced, or can you be grateful for the thought/intention?
- *Ulterior motive:* Must gratitude always involve benevolent intentions or can you feel grateful when there is an ulterior motive?
- *Malicious Intention:* Similarly, can you feel grateful when there were malicious intentions?
- *Mixed emotions:* Can you still feel gratitude when other (negative) feelings are involved such as guilt and indebtedness?

To explore these issues, we created four scenarios. Two scenarios involved high levels of gratitude (a rescue from a lake and a rescue from a fire). Two scenarios involved lower levels of gratitude (a nomination for an award and being a beneficiary in a will). Each scenario followed the same structure; they started with a baseline condition which was systematically manipulated to assess the various conceptual controversies. For instance, in Scenario 2 (nomination) the baseline condition reads: '*A colleague nominates you for an award at work. If you win, you will receive recognition of your hard work and a voucher*'. To assess whether individuals can be grateful in the presence of an ulterior motive, participants are subsequently presented with: '*A colleague nominates you for an award at work. If you win, you will receive recognition of your hard work and a voucher. The colleague has nominated you because she wants you to repay the favour by helping her with her own workload*'.

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For each condition (baseline, ulterior motive, non-realised benefit, etc.), respondents are asked three separate questions: (a) whether they *would* be grateful if that situation were to arise, (b) how grateful they would be (i.e., *degree* of gratitude), and (c) whether they *should* be grateful (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Example from Scenario 2 (nomination for an award); the conceptual controversy being tested here is the presence of an ulterior motive:

A colleague nominates you for an award at work. If you win, you will receive recognition of your hard work and a voucher. The colleague has nominated you because she wants you to repay the favour by helping her with her own workload.

(a) You **are** grateful to the colleague who nominated you.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Neither agree nor disagree   Agree   Strongly agree

*(b) Please indicate the **degree** of gratitude you feel on the scale below:*

Not at all   Most grateful
grateful   you could feel

(c) You **should** be grateful to the colleague who nominated you.

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Neither agree nor disagree   Agree   Strongly agree

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To ensure the questionnaire was a manageable length, only two scenarios were tested at a time. The order and type of scenario presented was counterbalanced across participants. Adults accessed the questionnaires online while adolescents in full time education completed them in hard copy.

Participants:

510 adults across the UK participated: 74% were female; 80% were White-British; mean age 28 years.

271 Secondary school pupils from Cheshire (England) participated: 54% were female; 95% White-British; mean age 14 years.

Analysis:

Data from the two high gratitude scenarios (1 and 3), and the two low gratitude scenarios (2 and 4) were combined. Scores for the ARE, DEGREE and SHOULD questions for each condition were

calculated and entered into a repeated analysis of variance (rANOVA). The rANOVA examined differential responding from the baseline condition in the high and low gratitude scenarios enabling us to see, for example, whether the presence of an ulterior motive decreases gratitude experience in comparison to the baseline condition.

Findings:

Cost (or effort/ risk) to the benefactor: In the low gratitude scenarios, the mean scores for ARE, DEGREE and SHOULD questions[3] all increased significantly in relation to the baseline where benefactors expended greater effort in bestowing a benefit. The mean score at baseline ARE was 4.30 (SD = 0.79) in comparison with a mean cost ARE score of 4.57 (SD = 0.67). The mean baseline DEGREE was 73.25% (SD = 18.33), compared with a mean cost DEGREE rating of 80.34% (SD = 16.68). Finally, the mean baseline SHOULD was 4.40 (SD = 0.68), whereas the mean cost SHOULD score was 4.50 (SD = 0.71). Therefore, cost or effort appears to be an amplifier of gratitude experience. Conversely, however, in the high gratitude scenarios there was no perceived increase in ARE, DEGREE or SHOULD scores with higher costs to the benefactor. This is due to extremely high gratitude scores at baseline (M = 4.89; SD = 0.44) with almost no room for an increase (see Graph 1). We speculate that when the benefit is as enormous as saving one's life then as long as the benefit is realised the specifics of the rescue are immaterial.

Duty/Supererogation: There is strong evidence that laypeople (at least in our sample) believe gratitude is warranted to individuals who are simply fulfilling the requirements of their job; only 1.4% disagreed/strongly disagreed that they would be grateful to the lifeguard or firefighter because it is their job to help.

Value of the benefit: We examined whether an unwanted award or non-valuable legacy would influence the level of reported gratitude. The value of the benefit was tested in Scenarios 2 and 4 (as you could not profess that saving a life is non-valuable). Interestingly, the mean responses to all three measures (ARE, DEGREE and SHOULD) significantly decreased in comparison to the baseline. The mean baseline DEGREE was 73.25% (SD = 18.33), compared with a mean non-valuable DEGREE rating of 49.73% (SD = 24.08)[4]. This suggests that it is not *always* the thought that counts. A mixed ANOVA comparing adults and adolescents also revealed that adults reported significantly lower levels of gratitude for an unwanted benefit than adolescents (p < .01).

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[3] In the following descriptions, ARE scores refer to mean responses to the 'you are grateful' Likert questions; DEGREE scores refer to mean responses to 'how grateful would you be' slider questions; and SHOULD scores refer to mean responses to 'you should be grateful' Likert questions.

[4] The mean score at baseline ARE was 4.30; SD = 0.79 in comparison with a mean non-valuable ARE score of 3.29; SD = 1.02. Lastly the mean baseline SHOULD was 4.40; SD = 0.68, whereas the mean non-valuable SHOULD score was 3.80; SD = 0.83

Non-realised benefit: When examining the effect of an attempted benefaction that did not materialise reported gratitude decreased in all three measures in comparison to baseline. The mean baseline DEGREE was 73.25% (SD = 18.33), compared with a mean non-realised DEGREE rating of 66.83% (SD = 20.64)[5]. Again this indicates that the proverb 'it's the thought that counts' may not always ring true.

Ulterior motive: When an ulterior motive is present in an apparent benefaction (e.g. the colleague wanting help with her workload), we see significant decrements in gratitude experience (Baseline DEGREE = 73.25%; SD = 18.33; Ulterior Motive DEGREE = 37.53%, SD = 24.0). Surprisingly, however, over one fifth of the respondents reported that they *would* still feel grateful regardless of the ulterior motive (see Graph 2).

Malicious intention: Similarly, the presence of a malicious motive also undermines reported gratitude (Malicious DEGREE = 27.12%; SD = 23.98). Yet again, however, a malicious intention does not necessarily disqualify gratitude as over 12% of our sample stated that they would be grateful even when the benefit was given with the intention of embarrassing or harming them.

Mixed emotions: Within the low gratitude scenarios we also examined whether negative feelings such as guilt and indebtedness could coincide with gratitude. Interestingly, when asked to imagine feeling either guilty or indebted a large proportion of respondents still reported that they would be grateful 58.1% agreed and 21.9% strongly agreed that they would be grateful despite feelings of indebtedness or guilt. However, the level of reported gratitude in this situation did decrease significantly in comparison to baseline. The mean baseline DEGREE was 73.25% (SD = 18.33), compared with a mean mixed DEGREE rating of 67.13% (SD = 19.07)[6].A mixed-design ANOVA demonstrated that adults were significantly ($p < .01$) more likely than adolescents to acknowledge the co-occurrence of gratitude with mixed emotions (i.e., guilt and indebtedness).

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[5] The mean baseline ARE score was 4.30; SD = 0.79 in comparison with a mean non-realised ARE score of 4.07; SD = 0.82. The mean baseline SHOULD score was 4.40; SD = 0.68, whereas the mean non-realised SHOULD score was 4.18; SD = 0.82.
[6] The mean score at baseline ARE was 4.30; SD = 0.79 in comparison with a mean mixed ARE score of 3.95; SD = 0.80. The mean baseline SHOULD was 4.40; SD = 0.68, whereas the mean mixed SHOULD score was 4.13; SD = 0.75.

Graph 1: Mean ARE and SHOULD Likert scores in each condition of the high gratitude scenarios
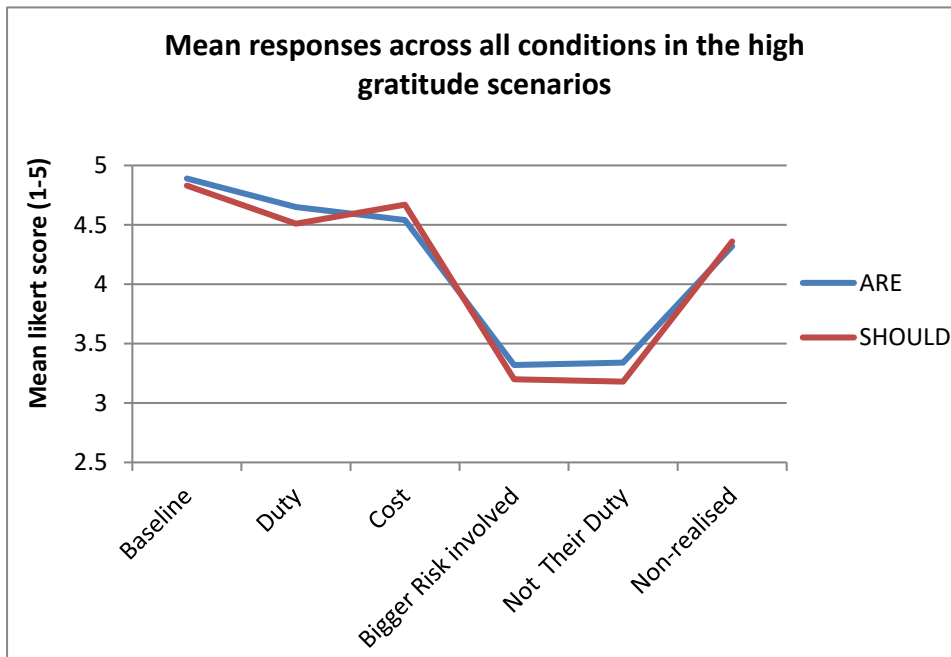
Graph 2: Mean ARE and SHOULD Likert scores in each condition of the low gratitude scenarios
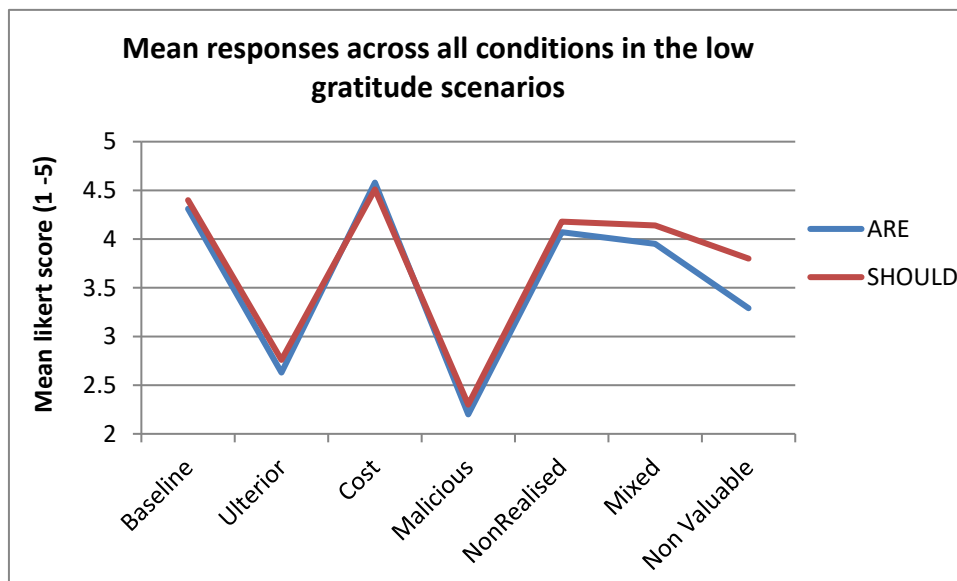
When comparing lay British public with expert views on gratitude we see considerable agreement. For example, cost or effort on the part of the benefactor appears to enhance gratitude experience, whilst the presence of non-benevolent intentions and non-valuable or non-realised benefits seems to undermine gratitude experience. This supports the idea that whilst a benefit is not required to be costly, valuable or well-intended, these factors act as amplifiers of gratitude experience

(McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons & Larson, 2001; Tesser, Gatewood & Driver, 1968; Wood et al., 2008).

Our data does suggest, however, that supererogation is not a necessary condition of gratitude, as posited by Roberts (2004). The majority of participants reported that they would feel grateful towards someone who was simply doing their job. An interesting development of this scenario, however, would be to examine whether gratitude to those doing their job extended to more mundane circumstances such as being grateful to a bus driver or waiter; perhaps the magnitude of the benefit in life-saving scenarios influenced respondents' decisions.

One possibly surprisingly finding here concerns the proportion of respondents who were grateful regardless of non-benevolent intentions. Over 20% reported that they would be grateful when an ulterior motive was implicated, and over 12% stated that they would be grateful even if malicious intentions were involved. This suggests that experiences of gratitude may extend to situations which do not involve benevolent intentions.

The findings from this questionnaire also indicate that gratitude can coincide with negative feelings such as guilt and indebtedness. In scenarios where guilt and indebtedness were intimated, a large percentage (80 %) reported that they would be grateful despite feelings of guilt or indebtedness. However, the degree of gratitude experienced decreased relative to the baseline. This co-occurrence of gratitude and negative feelings, in this vignette questionnaire and the prototype analysis, challenges the view that gratitude is entirely positive. It suggests gratitude may have a shadow side that we believe should be recognised more openly. In a recent paper, Morgan et al. (2015) we argue that ignoring negative associations of gratitude could have potentially dangerous effects and that gratitude, like other 'positive' emotions, can be both 'sweet-and-sour' (Colombetti, 2005, p .117).

4. **Accessing Children's Understanding of Gratitude with Stories**

To explore children's understanding of gratitude (aged 8-11 years) we developed four gratitude stories. Over these four stories we examined the same conceptual controversies highlighted in the vignette questionnaire. For example, in one story, 'St Oscar's Oscars', a student nominates a classmate for an award at school only to reveal that her motive behind this benefaction was to copy the nominee's answers in a spelling test. In 'The Class Councillor', a shy boy called Jason is nominated class councillor with the aim of embarrassing him in front of his peers. (Importantly, however, Jason rose to the occasion and even won the votes of the antagonists).

As far as possible, these four stories mapped onto events in the vignette questionnaire: 'The Blue Oasis' follows a rescue from a waterpark which is akin to Scenario 1; 'The Class Councillor' and 'St Oscar's Oscars' follow themes outlined in Scenarios 2 and 4 of the questionnaire; and 'Shooting Hoops' explores issues of duty.

In order to collect data, the stories were interjected with questions probing students' thoughts on whether the characters in the stories would feel grateful. The questions included Yes/No responses, Likert items on the level of gratitude experienced, and open-ended questions. Within a one-hour lesson, teachers read one of the four stories with their students, pausing at set junctures to answer questions.

Participants:

269 primary school pupils (aged 8 – 11 years) completed one of the story workbooks. Six schools across the UK participated, 90 students were from the West Midlands; 33 from Derbyshire and 146 from Scotland. 80.3% were White-British, 51% were female.

Findings:

Cost (or risk) to the benefactor and Non-realised benefit: 'The Blue Oasis', like Scenario 1 of the questionnaire, explored whether a higher level of gratitude is deemed fitting towards a *passer-by* who attempts at great risk to themselves (but fails) to save a struggling swimmer, or towards a *lifeguard* who succeeds in saving the swimmer. 65% of the primary school sample believed they would be more grateful to the man who tried but failed to save them. Children appeared to calibrate gratitude in terms of cost/risk as opposed to the realisation of the benefit. When asked *why*, 27% of students' qualitative responses referenced 'risk'.

Interestingly, adults appeared to take a less favourable view of risk-taking behaviour. In comparison to adolescents, adults were significantly ($p < .001$) more likely to *disagree* that they would be grateful to a passer-by (in comparison to a lifeguard or firefighter) because 'there is a bigger risk involved' (34.6% and 11.2% respectively). Therefore, perhaps adults view risk-taking behaviours as foolhardy rather than virtuous (see Arthur et al., 2015).

Duty/Supererogation: 'Shooting Hoops' explored duty by describing an eventful game of basketball where the characters' sense of duty to retrieve a wayward ball was continually altered. When Dinesh accidentally sent Liam's ball over the fence, 93% believed that Liam would be grateful to Dinesh for retrieving the ball (even though it was Dinesh's duty to retrieve it). However, when Jade retrieved

the ball after Liam sent it flying (supererogation) 97.5% reported that Liam would be grateful. Whilst gratitude does not necessarily entail going above and beyond the call of duty, supererogatory acts may enhance gratitude experience.

Value of the benefit: In 'The Blue Oasis', the birthday boy, Ben, is gifted a non-valuable benefit- a lame supermarket Donald Duck birthday cake (when he expected a home-baked rocket cake). When asked whether Ben would be grateful for the cake, 79 % agreed. However, this situation is not directly comparable to the vignette scenario as there is still some value in the cake. This was highlighted by the participants themselves, some of whom pointed out that 'a cake is still a cake'. In the open-ended responses, 44% referenced the fact that Ben still got a cake or that a cake is nonetheless nice. 12% mentioned the fact that Ben received the cake in addition to other presents, implying that they thought gratitude was appropriate.

Ulterior motive: 29% believed that a character (Robbie) would be grateful for a nomination for an achievement award even though it was done with the ulterior motive of (Lois) copying Robbie's spelling test. Interestingly, when examining the qualitative responses it was apparent that only 70% of respondents actually understood that an ulterior motive was present.

Malicious intention: In terms of malicious motives, 86% of respondents believed that Jason would *not* be grateful for his nomination to be class councillor when malicious intentions drove the 'benefaction'.

Mixed emotions: To explore the effect of mixed emotions, 'St Oscar's Oscars' includes a circumstance where Ethan receives a nomination for an achievement award from Jordan. Ethan now feels obliged to nominate Jordan in return; however, he really wants to nominate another classmate, Dominic. Following this feeling of obligation, 37% of the sample believed that Ethan would not be grateful for the nomination and 3% explicitly amended the workbooks to answer Yes *and* No. Open-ended responses revealed that 40% of children believed Ethan would experience confusion and 13% mentioned a sense of awkwardness. Interestingly, 21% of the sample reported that Ethan should now nominate Jordan in return.

In summary, our data revealed that almost all adults, adolescents and children believed that gratitude was *not* subject to a supererogation condition.[7] The data demonstrated some interesting generational differences; younger respondents appeared to take a more positive view of a have-a-go hero who helped at greater risk than their older counterparts did. The vignette data also revealed that adults were significantly *less* grateful to receive a benefit that was not of any real value to them (e.g. a nomination for an unwanted award) than adolescents (p < .01). This indicates that younger people may be more likely to appreciate the thought behind an intended benefit. Adults were significantly *more* likely than adolescents (p < .01) to acknowledge that mixed emotions (guilt or indebtedness) co-occur with gratitude (see Arthur et al., 2015).

As we have explained, the stories were written with the principal goal of tapping children's understanding of gratitude; the vignettes would not have been suitable for primary school children. However, in addition to fulfilling this explicit aim, we recommend these stories as educational resources for teaching young people about when gratitude is – and is perhaps *not*- appropriate (see Morgan, et al. 2015 in press). Our analysis revealed that almost a third of children did not appear to understand when ulterior motives were involved in an apparent benefaction. Furthermore, around 20% thought feelings of indebtedness obligated a character in the story to nominate a different person than they had previously intended. Given these findings, we propose that the workbooks could be used as a means of teaching young people complexities surrounding the appropriate 'grammar' of the virtue of gratitude.

5. Objections to our Empirical Approach

As we have shown, it is our contention that empirical data on laypeople's understanding of gratitude can be used to illuminate conceptual points. For example, our data show that a large sample of laypeople -across a range of ages- do not deem gratitude to be subject to a supererogation condition. Philosophers- or psychologists who either explicitly -or implicitly- take the view that gratitude *necessarily* involves a benefactor going above and beyond the call of duty can thus be presented with data at odds with their a priori theorizing. We suggest that the intuitions of these theorists be challenged and refined on the basis of empirical observations, such as ours, so that a

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[7] 98% adults and 95% adolescents agreed/strongly agreed that they would be grateful to a lifeguard/firefighter rescuing them in the line of duty. Similarly, 99% of 8-11 year olds agreed with the statement that a character in a story 'should be grateful to the lifeguard for getting her out of difficulties even though it is her job to do that.'

'reflective equilibrium' may be reached between 'conceptual- normative' and 'empirical-factual' work on gratitude.

The approach we advocate may be disquieting for many philosophers, who may take the view that presenting empirical data to illuminate conceptual points represents a category mistake. Critics of the empirical approach proposed here may argue that philosophers, equipped with rigorous training in abstract thought and logic are best suited to undertake conceptual analysis. Roberts, while acknowledging that his conceptual work on the nature of gratitude and its status as a virtue has undergone refinement and correction through his interaction with the present authors (2015, p. 4), also makes a forthright appeal for the merits of philosophical theorizing; 'Philosophers are equipped by their historical knowledge and above all by their training in dialectics (argument, rebuttal, comparison, and conceptual analysis) to answer normative questions. As valuable as it may be to know what the British think about gratitude, no amount of such information will settle questions about what gratitude really is, the value of gratitude, or the particular conditions for gratitude's counting as a human excellence.' (2015, p. 4).

The present authors believe there is a place for *both* what Roberts calls 'conceptual- normative' work and 'empirical-factual' work on gratitude. Consequently, we do not claim that *all* conceptual theorising about gratitude ultimately stands or falls on the basis of empirical data, which, it must be recognised, derive from *particular* population samples which cannot be generalised absolutely. This is an epistemological point: it simply would not be possible to canvass *all* lay understandings of gratitude in any study, and – as such- the empirical method could never be said to have the 'final word'. Nonetheless, the impossibility of *that* task should not preclude the possibility of undertaking *any* empirical research in an attempt to illuminate these matters from a lay perspective.

To put this point in more concrete terms, we do not take the view that if, for the sake of argument, 85% of a large and diverse sample of laypeople believe that X is a condition of the proper applicability of (virtue) concept C, then philosophers should take this as the *last* word on the nature of C. We do believe, however, that this should be the *first* word, and that if philosophers want to insist that X is *not* a conceptual condition of C, it becomes incumbent on them to explain why the majority of a sample representative of the general public, are wrong. Truth- famously- is not democratic, so the proper meaning of concepts should not be decided on purely numerical grounds. On the other hand, however, philosophers should have no monopoly on the way language is used by ordinary people, as we have argued elsewhere (see Gulliford et al., 2013; Morgan & Gulliford, 2015).

6. Conclusions

Our approach resonates to some degree with a recent movement in philosophy that emphasises the importance of canvassing lay conceptual understandings, and of basing definitions on observation and experiment, rather than purely a priori theorizing. The field called 'experimental philosophy', has recently risen to prominence, championed by the likes of Joshua Knobe (Knobe, 2004; Knobe, 2007; Knobe & Prinz, 2008; Knobe & Nichols, 2008) and Shaun Nichols (Nicols, 2004; Nichols & Knobe, 2007) who have applied an empirical approach to the philosophical topics of consciousness, determinism and intentional action, for example.

We maintain that our approach of canvassing lay understanding of the topic of gratitude- what we have referred to as the views of 'the Many', *complements* rather than supplants, the views of 'the Wise'. We have suggested elsewhere that philosophers pay attention to the work undertaken in this domain as 'a good conceptual analysis needs to respect ordinary language as much as possible' (Gulliford, Morgan & Kristjansson, 2013, p. 35). Moreover, an empirical approach can weigh in on questions about the putative characteristics of gratitude and the conditions in which it is experienced.

For instance, we found that to some extent it *isn't* just the thought that counts; non-realised   and non-valuable benefits significantly decreased reported gratitude. Furthermore, our research showed that gratitude was *not* disqualified by malicious or ulterior motives on the part of a benefactor. It will be recalled that a fifth of respondents reported they would be grateful when an ulterior motive was present, while over 12% indicated that they would be grateful even where malicious intentions were at play. These findings clearly go against the received view that gratitude *requires* benevolent intentions. Data from the prototype analysis and the vignette questionnaire also challenge the perception, familiar to psychology, but also common in the philosophical literature, that gratitude is unambiguously positive in valence.

On the basis of these and other insights, we wholeheartedly support the merits of an empirical approach. While some devotees of the armchair may offer their objections to the contamination of lofty theorising with what they may perceive as misguided empirical quarrying, we believe the approach has much to offer a conceptual understanding of gratitude, and we advocate similarly interdisciplinary examinations of other virtues alongside gratitude in the future.

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