



Gratitude Is Only Fittingly Targeted Towards Agents

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Abstract

The paper argues that ‘All varieties of gratitude are only overall fitting when targeted towards agents,’ for instance that any variety of gratitude for the beautiful sunset is only overall fitting if a supernatural agent such as God exists. The first premise is that ‘Propositional gratitude is overall fitting only when targeted towards agents.’ For this premise, intuitive judgments are offered. The second premise is that ‘Propositional gratitude is the paradigmatic variety of gratitude.’ For this premise, an aspect of the common consent of philosophers about gratitude is noted and the metaphysical basicness of propositional gratitude is argued for. This gives the intermediate conclusion that ‘The paradigmatic variety of gratitude is overall fitting only when targeted towards agents.’ The fourth premise is that ‘If the paradigmatic variety of gratitude is overall fitting only when targeted towards agents, then all varieties of gratitude are overall fitting only when targeted towards agents.’ To supply the conditional of this premise, the Paradigmatic Fittingness Principle is offered, which states that ‘Paradigmatic emotions set the fittingness conditions for their non-paradigmatic varieties.’ This principle is argued for by noting that it vindicates some popular and plausible intuitive judgements and gives an error theory of why one might think that gratitude could be fittingly targeted towards non-agents, and by suggesting the absence of any other plausible source of fittingness conditions for non-paradigmatic emotions.

Keywords Fittingness · Gratitude · Moral psychology · Philosophy of emotion · Theism

Introduction

A recurring topic of popular discussion is whether atheists and naturalists can fittingly feel gratitude for things that are not the products of human agency, such as a beautiful sunset. The thesis of this paper is that all varieties of gratitude are only fittingly targeted

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towards agents. Hence, we can only fittingly feel gratitude for the beautiful sunset if some supernatural agent such as the God of monotheism or the gods of polytheism exist (and have created the beautiful sunset to benefit us). Here is the argument:

(1) Propositional gratitude is overall fitting only when targeted towards agents.

(2) Propositional gratitude is the paradigmatic variety of gratitude.

Therefore, (3) the paradigmatic variety of gratitude is overall fitting only when targeted towards agents. (from 1, 2)

(4) If the paradigmatic variety of gratitude is overall fitting only when targeted towards agents, then all varieties of gratitude are overall fitting only when targeted towards agents.

Therefore, (5) all varieties of gratitude are only overall fitting when targeted towards agents. (from 3, 4)

To begin, I outline the idea of fittingness, review the varieties of gratitude suggested in the philosophical literature, and argue for (1) based on some intuitive judgments. I then outline what I mean by paradigmatic and argue for (2) by noting an aspect of the common consent about gratitude among philosophers and by suggesting that propositional gratitude is metaphysically basic with respect to the other varieties of gratitude. I then argue for a principle that supplies the conditional of (4), the *Paradigmatic Fittingness Principle* (PFP) which states that ‘Paradigmatic emotions set the fittingness conditions for their non-paradigmatic varieties.’ My argument for the PFP is abductive. It vindicates some popular and plausible judgments about the fittingness of the non-paradigmatic varieties of gratitude, it gives an error theory of why some might think that gratitude could be fittingly targeted towards non-agents, and paradigmatic emotions are the only plausible source of fittingness conditions for their non-paradigmatic varieties. I then answer two objections to be found in the philosophical literature, that the non-paradigmatic varieties of gratitude have their own simpler fittingness conditions, and that the non-paradigmatic varieties of gratitude are in fact instances of appreciation.

Propositional Gratitude Is Overall Fitting Only When Targeted Towards Agents

Fittingness

Judgments of fittingness (or appropriateness, aptness, correctness (McHugh and Way 2016; Srinivasan 2018) are widely employed in contemporary philosophy, but are difficult to analyze in terms of other judgments (Howard 2018). As examples, it is fitting to believe the truth, it is fitting to desire the desirable, and it is fitting to blame the blameworthy. In each case, we have a mental attitude that is intentional in that it is about something. Each token of these mental attitudes is about some *token object* (some token truth, some token desirable thing, some token blameworthy act), and as types, these mental attitudes are about the same *formal object* (the true, the desirable, the blameworthy). In each case, there is a relation of fit between these attitudes and their respective formal objects which provides a ‘reason of fit’ for taking up these attitudes

when the formal object is instantiated in one's circumstance and reason of fit for not taking up these attitudes when the formal object is not instantiated in one's circumstance. Note that there may be other reasons for taking up these attitudes or not, such as prudential or moral reasons for believing something that is not true. That such a token mental attitude would be unfitting is a reason for not taking it up drawn from the nature of the attitude itself, and a reason which at most margins seems to be more weighty than these other kinds of reasons (often termed 'wrong kinds of reasons' (Hieronymi 2005)).

Most types of emotion seem to have two types of intentional mental attitudes as parts. For one thing, they involve cognitions, representations that some formal object is instantiated in one's circumstance. An episode of fear represents that the fearful is instantiated in one's circumstance. For another thing, most types of emotions involve conations, desires that incline one to act in some way in response to the instantiation of a formal object in one's circumstance. An episode of fear involves desires such as to flee or to hide. So, most emotions can be assessed for fittingness both in terms of the representations that they involve and the desires that they involve. If there is nothing fearful about one's circumstance, it is unfitting to have an episode of fear that represents the fearful as instantiated in one's circumstance, nor (all else being equal) is it fitting to have the desires of fear. For instance, fear of a piece of toast is unfitting because a piece of toast is not fearful. The present discussion will focus mainly on the fittingness of the cognitive aspect of gratitude, the formal object that it represents.

Note that evaluations of fit are distinct from evaluations of warrant, which concern whether one has sufficient evidence that the formal object represented by one's emotion is instantiated in one's circumstance. So, if there is an angry dog in the garden that I have not seen or heard, fear would be fitting but not warranted. Again, evaluations of fit are distinct from evaluations of consistence, which concern the relation between one's emotions and one's other mental attitudes (Scarantino 2018). So, if there is an angry dog in the garden and I feel fear but for some reason I believe that the dog is a hallucination, my fear is fitting but inconsistent.

The Varieties of Gratitude

One variety of gratitude is prepositional gratitude. Prepositional gratitude is triadic in that it has a three-place representational structure. The first and third nodes are agents and the second node is a benefit: 'A₁ [agent/beneficiary] is grateful for B [benefit] to A₂ [agent/benefactor].' The second node is the *focus* of prepositional gratitude and the third node is the *target* of prepositional gratitude. If I feel prepositional gratitude to you for the punnet of strawberries that you have given me, then the punnet of strawberries is the focus and you are the target.

Another variety of gratitude is triadic but where the third node is not any familiar kind of agent, but rather what seems to be a thing: 'A₁ is grateful for B to T [thing].' Sean McAleer offers as an example, from John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, the case of the prospector's gratitude targeted at the mountain that has been the source of his riches (McAleer 2012, p. 56). Patrick Boleyn-Fitzgerald offers the example of gratitude targeted at one's trusty old car or at a part of one's own body (Boleyn-Fitzgerald 2016, p. 114). Under this heading, we can also note various gratitudes in which the third node is something more unusual such as nature, an ecosystem (Bardsley 2013; Manela 2018), 'destiny,' 'fate,' 'life,' or 'the universe'

(Solomon 2002). Following David Carr, I will use the term ‘quasi-targeted gratitude’ (Carr 2016, p. 171) to cover all these cases.

Another variety of gratitude is propositional gratitude. Propositional gratitude is dyadic in that it has a two-place representational structure. The first node is an agent and the second node is a benefit: ‘ A_1 is grateful that B .’ Propositional gratitude has a focus but no target. As an example, A.D.M. Walker gives the case of ‘the picnickers grateful that the sunshine has dispelled the mist and revealed the panoramic view’ (Walker 1981, p. 45), where the picnickers are grateful that the sunshine has dispelled but mist, but not grateful to any A_2 nor to any T .

In addition, it is widely held (though see the second objection) that each variety of gratitude involves some kind of benevolent or pro-social desire, a ‘desire to make a return’ (Walker 1981, p. 49). In the case of prepositional gratitude, one desires to benefit one’s benefactor. In the case of quasi-targeted gratitude’ one desires to make better the thing that has benefited one (‘we’ve wounded this mountain... it’s our duty to close her wounds; it’s the least we can do to show our gratitude for all the wealth she’s given us’ (McAleer 2012, p. 55)). In the case of propositional gratitude, ‘there is no particular person whom the grateful man wants to favour... [he might want to favour] almost anyone’ (Walker 1981, p. 50).

The Fittingness Conditions of Prepositional Gratitude

From its three-place representational structure, it seems that the formal object of prepositional gratitude, the ‘prepositional gratefulworthy,’ represents an agent. One way of ascertaining more precisely the formal object represented by an emotion, and so its fittingness conditions so far as that emotion’s cognitive aspect is concerned, is to come up with a rough list of the features a circumstance could have and noting one’s intuitive judgments about whether such features make the emotion more fitting or less fitting. In this way, we get an idea of the different features that are the parts that make up an emotion’s formal object. As an example, in the case of the ‘hopeworthy,’ we plausibly look for three features; that some event is possible, that it is not extremely probable, and that it is valuable. I now offer a non-exhaustive list of features (empirical, evaluative, and normative) of a circumstance that it seems to me tend to make prepositional gratitude fitting and whose absence tends to make prepositional gratitude unfitting. I emphasize that none of the features listed seems to be by itself a necessary condition on the fittingness of prepositional gratitude:

- (A) I got a benefit.
- (B) The benefit was intended for me by a benefactor.
- (C) The benefit was intended for me with good will by a benefactor.
- (D) The getting of the benefit went beyond what I could demand as a right from the benefactor.
- (E) I accepted the benefit, and for the right reason.
- (F) I have special reason to benefit the benefactor.
- (G) The giving of the benefit infringed no moral standard or social convention.
- (H) The giving of the benefit was supererogatory for the benefactor.
- (I) The giving of the benefit imposed a cost or risk on the benefactor.
- (J) A special relationship with the benefactor has been established or reaffirmed.
- (K) Some uses of the benefit are suitable or unsuitable in light of its being from a benefactor.

If we imagine some circumstance in which all of the features (A–K) were instantiated, it seems clear that prepositional gratitude would be fitting. This shows that features (A–K), if not being a perfect or exhaustive list of the features that go to make up the prepositional-gratitudeworthy, comes close to capturing the features of the prepositional-gratitudeworthy. I now offer some clarifications on the relationship between features (A–K) and the fittingness of prepositional gratitude.

First, it seems that an emotion can be judged as more fitting or less fitting along an indefinite spectrum, as the features of the formal object that the emotion represents and the features of one's circumstance are more or less similar. Suppose that your dog accidentally bites you when you are playing with her. Anger at her seems more fitting than in the case in which she had not bitten you. However, we also make a judgment about whether an emotion is overall fitting or unfitting, and it is this judgment that premise (1) concerns. Plausibly, anger at your dog would be overall unfitting because she has not wronged you, has not displayed hostility, and so forth. Without features like 'having been wronged' or 'having been the target of hostility,' it seems that a circumstance is not angerworthy, even though we can see that 'having been harmed' is somewhat similar to 'having been wronged' and so that your anger at your dog is not without any degree of fittingness. There are also ambiguous cases in which we reasonably disagree or are unsure in making a judgment about the overall fittingness of an emotion. For example, we may not be sure what to say about the overall fittingness of prepositional gratitude in the case in which features (A–B, D–K) are true but where the benefactor gave the benefit with some mixture of good and bad will.

Second, features (A–K) are of differing importance in terms of how they contribute to the fittingness of an episode of prepositional gratitude, indicating that some features are more central to the prepositional-gratitudeworthy than others. (A–C) seem very important whereas (H) or (I) much less so. Nevertheless, in the circumstance in which (H) or (I) are true prepositional gratitude is more fitting than when they are not true, which again shows that they are part of its formal object. As an illustration, we might imagine that Jack says 'Why should I be grateful to Jill? She gave me a loan, but what is that to her? She's stinking rich, it cost her nothing!' What Jack says here is understandable because he is indeed pointing out the absence of a feature that tends to make gratitude fitting, (I). We would probably respond to Jack by pointing out the much greater preponderance of features of his circumstance that make prepositional gratitude to Jill overall fitting.

Third, there are many close analogues to (A–K) that provide as much, or almost as much, fittingness for prepositional gratitude, e.g., '(A*) My daughter got a benefit.' Further, there are many more distant analogues that provide some fittingness, e.g., '(A**) I got neither a benefit nor a harm, but this was lucky.' Some of these more distant analogues often seem to be true in the circumstances in which propositional and quasi-targeted gratitude are often felt. For instance, of the beautiful sunset, it is true that '(D*) The getting of the benefit was something to which I had no right,' but this differs significantly from (D) in that one cannot make demands of non-agents. Again, the prospector who has found riches in the mountain might have some special reason to restore the natural beauty of the mountain, and this 'making better' of the thing that has benefited him is an (F*) akin to the making better-off of a benefactor identified in (F).

So, should we say that (1) 'Prepositional gratitude is overall fitting only when targeted towards agents'? We should, since in the case in which one gets a benefit from something other than an agent none of (B–K) are true, since these features all represent an agent, either directly or under the guise of evaluations and norms that

concern a benefactor and the beneficiary's relation to them.¹ This is not to say that in the case in which one gets a benefit from something other than an agent, there would be no fittingness at all to a feeling of prepositional gratitude. If (A) is true, and if some distant analogues to (B–K) are true, then prepositional gratitude is more fitting than if (A) and these distant analogues were not true, even though it is overall unfitting. Concretely, if I feel prepositional gratitude to the blackberry bush in my garden for yielding the benefit of delicious blackberries, I am having an emotion that is overall unfitting, even though it is clearly more fitting than feeling prepositional gratitude to a blackberry bush that yields only thorns.

Prepositional Gratitude Is the Paradigmatic Variety of Gratitude

From (A–K), we have an idea of the formal object of prepositional gratitude, the prepositional-gratitudeworthy. From the brief survey of the varieties of gratitude made above, it seems that prepositional and quasi-targeted gratitude have different formal objects than prepositional gratitude. For instance, not being targeted at an agent, the formal object of quasi-targeted gratitude does not involve features (B–K) in a literal sense, even though it seems to involve distant analogues to them such as (D*) and (F*) as noted above. One question this raises is in virtue of what do all these formal objects count as ones of gratitude, as gratitudeworthy?

One way to answer to this question (along the lines of the classical theory of concepts) might be to specify the features that are necessary and sufficient for a formal object to count as gratitudeworthy. We have inductive reason to suppose that we will be unable to give such necessary and sufficient conditions (though see (Roberts 2004)). Another way to answer this question (along lines of the exemplar theory of concepts) might be call to mind a large number of various tokens of the gratitudeworthy and then, when presented with a new emotional episode, decide whether their formal objects were sufficiently similar to one another. This proposal, I suspect, would face difficulties in accounting for the intuition that some formal objects that can be classed as gratitudeworthy are nevertheless more or less gratitudeworthy than one another. I propose (along the lines of the prototype theory of concepts) to identify the formal object that is paradigmatically gratitudeworthy (or gratitudeworthy *simpliciter*), by which other formal objects are assessed in terms of how similar they are to it in their features. This proposal is in part motivated by the thought noted above that some features (A–K) seem very important for constituting the gratitudeworthy and others less so.²

I suggest that the prepositional-gratitudeworthy is the paradigmatically gratitudeworthy that other forms of gratitude count as gratitude only because they are sufficiently similar to it. A formal object with features (A–K) is paradigmatically gratitudeworthy, and as token emotional episodes come to have less of these

¹ As a reviewer's comment leads me to emphasize, an emotion like gratitude is therefore only fitting if there are really such things as agents. Similarly, I take no stand on various disputed cases about what things count as agents, e.g., whether governments or corporations are agents.

² I suggest only that the prototype way of approaching this topic seems the most fruitful, rather than relying on the more sweeping claim that the prototype theory of concepts is the correct one (Margolis and Laurence 2019).

features, they gradually become less gratefulworthy until, after a wide penumbra of ‘gratitudish’ cases, they do not count as gratefulworthy at all. My purpose in arguing for this claim is not to then assert various formal objects as gratefulworthy or not, but rather to proceed from the claim that prepositional gratitude is paradigmatic gratitude to a claim about the role that paradigmatic gratitude plays in setting the fittingness conditions of non-paradigmatic gratuities. I turn to stating two reasons for taking prepositional gratitude to be the paradigmatic variety of gratitude.

Common Consent

Many philosophers claim that prepositional gratitude is the only variety of gratitude, or give definitions of gratitude from which this claim follows (Berger 1975; Camenisch 1981; Manela 2016; McConnell 1993; McCullough et al. 2001; Roberts 2004). On such a claim, prepositional gratitude is by default the paradigmatic variety of gratitude, with any slight departure from that paradigmatic variety making an emotion not gratitude at all. Others allow that there are other varieties of gratitude, a view not inconsistent with the claim that prepositional gratitude is paradigmatic gratitude. However, so far as I am aware, nobody in the philosophical literature denies that prepositional gratitude is a variety of gratitude. This state of affairs regarding expert opinion is what we would predict if prepositional gratitude is the paradigmatic variety of gratitude, whereas it would be a puzzling state of affairs if in fact, say, propositional gratitude is the paradigmatic variety of gratitude.

Metaphysical Basicity

Michael Rush argues that ‘propositional gratitude is metaphysically more basic inasmuch as it can exist on its own, while every instance of targeted [prepositional] gratitude is grounded in an instance of propositional gratitude,’ (Rush 2019) so I address his argument for this claim. He defines these two varieties of gratitude as such:

Targeted [prepositional] Gratitude = df

A person, *p*, is grateful-to a (for *x*) iff:

- (1) *p* believes that *x* is a benefit to *p*;
- (2) *p* is glad that *x* is the case;
- (3) *p* believes that *a* brought about *x*, or played a relevant role in bringing about *x*;
- (4) *p* does not believe that *a* has any disqualifying negative intentions or attitudes.

Propositional Gratitude = df

p is grateful-that *x* iff:

- (1) and (2), plus
- (5) had *p* taken *a* to have brought about *x*, or played a relevant role in bringing about *x*, and not taken *a* to have any disqualifying negative intentions or attitudes, *p* would have been grateful to *a*. (Rush 2019, p. 16)

Rush then claims that:

propositional, but not targeted, gratitude can exist by itself. A person alone in the universe, without the company of human or other agents, unwatched by gods, and under no illusions about their solitude could properly be described as, for example, grateful that the rain held off for the harvest (Rush 2019, p. 17)

As I read him, Rush's argument is of the form that every token of propositional gratitude involves a token of propositional gratitude, and not vice versa; therefore, propositional gratitude is metaphysically basic with respect to propositional gratitude. If Rush is right, then it seems that we should say that propositional gratitude is the paradigmatic variety of gratitude, that propositional gratitude counts as gratitude only because it is one particular elaboration of propositional gratitude, a subset of propositional gratitude.

In response, it seems wrong, given Rush's definitions, to say that every token of propositional gratitude involves a token of propositional gratitude. On a straightforward reading, condition (5) seems to be a counterfactual. (5) represents that something is not the case, whereas the equivalent representation of propositional gratitude, (3–4), is of that thing being the case. When my good friend gives me a punnet of strawberries and so conditions (1–4) are met, condition (5) is not met. When I make the representation of propositional gratitude in such a case I am not also representing (5) that 'nobody has given me the punnet of strawberries, but if someone had done so without a disqualifying negative intention then I would feel grateful to that someone.' So, when my good friend gives me the punnet of strawberries, we have a token of propositional gratitude but not of propositional gratitude.

An alternative reading of condition (5) that avoids this criticism is possible. Perhaps in condition (5), the representation is not counterfactual but is instead conditional. That is, propositional gratitude does not represent that (3–4) are not the case, but represents that if (3–4) are the case, then one would feel propositional gratitude, without taking a stand on whether (3–4) are the case. Then, when (3–4) are the case and we have a token of propositional gratitude, we also have a token of propositional gratitude.

I suggest that a 'too many emotions' problem arises on this reading of (5). Such a reading requires that there are a large number of hypothetical emotions that plausibly we do not feel. This is because one can specify an indefinite number of conditionals like the one Rush may be read as giving. For example (taking (1*) and (2*) as very rough approximations):

Propositional Contempt = df

A person, *p*, is contemptuous-of a (for *x*) iff:

(1*) *p* believes that *x* is not worth *p*'s attention;

(2*) *p* believes that *x* is not valuable.

(3) *p* believes that *a* brought about *x*, or played a relevant role in bringing about *x*;

(4) *p* does not believe that *a* has any disqualifying intentions or attitudes.

Propositional Contempt = df

p is contemptuous-that *x* iff:

(1*) and (2*), plus

(5*) had p taken a to have brought about x, or played a relevant role in bringing about x, and not taken a to have any disqualifying intentions or attitudes, p would have been contemptuous of a.

Suppose that a person with fairly conservative tastes in art is reading a tabloid newspaper and sees an article about an avant-garde artist whose latest project is to make a muddy field by spending a few days stomping around a field. They might well feel ‘prepositional contempt’ for the artist; they might sigh and mutter ‘What a fool. Make art that is valuable! Who’d want to go and look at a muddy field?!’ But, if such a person is hiking in the countryside and sees a muddy field, it seems very odd to say that he or she might have an emotion that represents (1*–2*, 5*), ‘If this field had been made muddy by someone I’d have nothing but contempt for them!’, even though (1*–2*, 5*) are true. Plausibly, we just do not have an emotion like ‘prepositional contempt,’ but on the present reading of Rush we have to say that there is such an emotion that it is metaphysically basic with respect to ‘prepositional contempt’ in that every token of ‘prepositional contempt’ is also a token of ‘prepositional contempt.’ Again, to show how general the problem is, we might say that ‘conditional gratitude’ is metaphysically basic with respect to prepositional gratitude:

Conditional Gratitude = df

p is conditionally grateful-to a (for x) iff:

(3) and (4), plus

(5**) had p believed that x is a benefit to p, and had p been glad that x is the case, p would have been grateful to a.

It seems that we just do not have an emotion that represents (3–4, 5**) even though these can be the case, and even though one can have the thought ‘I would be grateful to grandma, if I liked her knitted sweaters.’ So, if we want to say that prepositional gratitude is metaphysically basic with respect to prepositional gratitude, that every token of the latter involves a token of the former, then we are forced to admit that every emotion involves a huge array of other more metaphysically basic emotions, including hypothetical emotions that plausibly we do not feel.

I suggest instead that prepositional gratitude is metaphysically basic with respect to prepositional gratitude and quasi-targeted gratitude in that every token of these is just a token of prepositional gratitude in which some parts of it, some features of its formal object, are *missing*.

To begin, consider the heart. The proper function of the heart is to pump blood. Depending on one’s preferred conception of function, this might be just to say that pumping blood is the fitness-enhancing property of the heart, or the property that causally explains the existence of the heart, or the goal towards which the heart is oriented, what it was designed to do, and so forth (no particular conception is required by our discussion (Allen and Neal 2020)). By contrast, the actual function of a heart is everything that it does, for instance, that it makes a characteristic sound, or that it beats too slowly. It is only by reference to the proper function of the heart that we assess whether it is malfunctioning. For instance, a heart that pumps blood without making its characteristic sound is not malfunctioning, even if its not having this actual function means that we do not have something valuable (say, a sound we find soothing),

whereas a heart that beats too slowly is malfunctioning. Note that most, though not all, of the actual functions and malfunctions of the heart are explained by reference to the details of how its parts serve its proper function. In such a way, we explain why hearts usually have the actual function of making their characteristic sound rather than having the actual function of emitting a chartreuse light. Again, in this way, we explain why hearts often have the actual function and malfunction of beating too slowly, rather than the actual function and malfunction of exploding. Lastly, note that having this particular proper function is in large part what constitutes something as being a heart. Roughly, a heart just is a thing which has the proper function of pumping blood (hence we rightly call artifacts designed to pump blood artificial hearts, even when their actual function only approximates this in a crude and unreliable manner or when they altogether fail to pump blood).

It seems that propositional gratitude has a proper function. Without being speciously precise about what this proper function is, it seems to be to draw our attention to the benefits of benefactors and to motivate us to respond to them in a pro-social manner. This proper function is itself plausibly an aspect of some higher proper function of the pro-social emotions in general, such as the cementing of social cooperation (McCullough et al. 2008; Nowak and Roch 2007). The formal object of propositional gratitude and its parts, as well as the desire that accompanies it, play a role in serving this proper function, just as the various strings and valves of the heart serve the proper function of pumping blood. By contrast, it is not clear that propositional and quasi-targeted gratitude likewise have a proper function distinct from that of propositional gratitude. For instance, to take the fitness-enhancing conception of function, it is not clear that feeling propositional gratitude for the beautiful sunset is fitness-enhancing. It might be suggested here that having an emotion like propositional gratitude serves the proper function of alerting us to things that are beneficial or valuable, but (as we will see later) this is a proper function already served by a simpler emotion, appreciation.

I suggest instead that propositional and quasi-targeted gratitude are actual functions and malfunctions of propositional gratitude. To illustrate this, another analogy. Suppose that one day, you go to the drive-through of your favorite fast-food chain and order a hamburger. Upon unwrapping your item, you discover that within the bun, there is ketchup, onion, lettuce, and pickle, but no beef patty. Barring something extraordinary, such as that the company is transitioning to a (rather unsatisfying) vegetarian menu, it seems that the best explanation of your item's existence is that it is a malfunction. That is, the 'proper function' of the chef *qua* chef-of-this-fast-food-chain is to produce hamburgers with beef patties, but on this occasion, their actual function has been to produce an item from which the beef patty is missing, a malfunction. Such an explanation accounts for why there is nevertheless a bun with various of the condiments typical of a hamburger but no beef patty. Likewise, in wanting an explanation of (say) quasi-targeted gratitude, we want an explanation of why we have an emotion that represents feature (A) along with features like (D*) and (F*), and why it is accompanied by a desire to make a return. A good explanation is that here we have an actual function and malfunction of propositional gratitude, from which various of the parts necessary for serving its proper function are missing. An insubstantial complication here is that quasi-targeted gratitude contains features that propositional gratitude does not, but which are like the features of propositional gratitude, such as (D*) and (F*).

Again, suppose you unwrap your item and find that within the bun there is salsa, shallots, swiss chard, sauerkraut, and spam. This rather hideous assemblage is recognizably an assemblage of substitutes, something explicable as a failed attempt at serving the proper function of producing hamburgers.

So, we may conclude that prepositional gratitude is metaphysically basic with respect to propositional and quasi-targeted in that the latter are plausibly explained as malfunctioning tokens of prepositional gratitude, tokens from which certain parts are missing but which are explicable by reference to their being failed attempts at attaining the proper function of prepositional gratitude.

If the Paradigmatic Variety of Gratitude is Overall Fitting Only When Targeted Towards Agents, Then All Varieties of Gratitude are Overall Fitting Only When Targeted Towards Agents

The *Paradigmatic Fittingness Principle* states that ‘Paradigmatic emotions set the fittingness conditions for their non-paradigmatic varieties.’ For example, the PFP says that if it is the case that (B) is a fittingness condition on prepositional gratitude, then (B) is likewise a fittingness condition on the fittingness of gratitude’s non-paradigmatic varieties, such as quasi-targeted gratitude. The PFP supplies the conditional of premise (4) which, in combination with the antecedent supplied by (3) would yield (5). I now offer three reasons for accepting the PFP.

The first reason is that the PFP helps give results that match some popular and plausible intuitive judgments, for instance that it is unfitting to feel gratitude targeted towards cars and mountains and the like. These intuitive judgments are not uncontroversial. Nevertheless, that some discursive principle in fact matches with some popular and plausible intuitions provides some reason for accepting it. By analogy, when we find that some moral principle matches a set of popular and plausible moral judgments, this provides reason for accepting it. As a random well-known example, consider Don Marquis’ ‘Future Like Ours’ principle of the wrongness of killing (Marquis 2013). This principle matches a range of popular and plausible intuitive judgments, such as that it is not wrong to passively euthanize someone in a persistent vegetative state. This provides reason for accepting this principle as compared with a principle of the wrongness of killing that does not match such intuitive judgments. Note that the PFP also appears to match popular and plausible judgments about the fittingness of other emotions. Though sociological evidence is difficult to adduce, and though more discussion of the formal objects of the paradigms of the emotions in question would be required, I expect that many would agree that the following emotional episodes are unfitting: envy of the sturdy boughs of an oak tree, feeling resentment towards the rain storm that soaks you as you are walking home, feeling embarrassed when your dog sees you emerge nude from the shower, feeling rude for continually thrashing the non-player characters in a shoot’em up game, and so forth.

The second reason is that the PFP helps give a plausible error-theory of why some might say that it is fitting for the prospector to feel gratitude to the mountain and the like. When we focus on this case and compare it with the case in the prospector feels gratitude to the mountain despite having found no gold in it, we judge that the former is more fitting. The PFP does not deny this, but rather, it explains it by saying that the case

in which (A) and some things distantly analogous to (B–K) are true is a case in which gratitude is indeed more fitting than when these things are not true. It is therefore understandable that one could confuse this judgment about degree of fittingness with a judgment about overall fittingness.

The third reason I will set out in the following subsection. It is highly intuitive to say that the non-paradigmatic varieties of an emotion can be more or less fitting. So, the non-paradigmatic varieties of an emotion must have fittingness conditions. A natural thought is that since the non-paradigmatic varieties of an emotion represent different formal objects than the paradigmatic variety of an emotion, they have different fittingness conditions. I suggest that although the non-paradigmatic varieties of an emotion do represent different formal objects, they represent metaphysically impossible formal objects which fail to give rise to fittingness conditions. This shows that we have reason to accept the PFP as paradigmatic emotions are the only plausible source of fittingness conditions for their non-paradigmatic varieties. The discussion given will complement, but not directly depend on, the account given in the previous section on which the non-paradigmatic varieties of gratitude are ones in which certain features of propositional gratitude's formal object are missing or are substituted with distantly analogous features.

Non-paradigmatic Emotions Have Metaphysically Impossible Formal Objects

Lucidity is a feeling that accompanies emotional episodes, its opposite being the feeling of murkiness. Emotional episodes which make metaphysically possible representations are accompanied by this feeling of lucidity, whereas emotional episodes which make metaphysically impossible representations are accompanied by the feeling of murkiness. Lucidity and murkiness are feelings about whether one's emotional episodes are representing possible formal objects or not. As an example of an emotional episode that feels lucid, consider your embarrassment at your young daughter's disgust at my cabbage soup. Without much reflection, you can easily get a sense of what this emotion represents and that it represents something metaphysically possible, and so of what has to be the case about one's circumstance for the emotion to be overall fitting. Roughly, for your embarrassment to be overall fitting, it should be the case that your daughter is in fact disgusted rather than that she is retching and pulling faces for some other reason, it should be the case that I have noticed her behavior, it should be the case that disgust at a host's food is considered insulting in our culture, and so forth. By contrast, consider the following case of a murky emotion. One day, you go walking in the woods with your young daughter and see an oak tree with sturdy boughs. Your daughter climbs and swings on the boughs and she is easily supported by them, whereas you can barely pick her up because you are very physically frail. You feel *envious* of the oak tree's sturdy boughs. Clearly, the occurrence of the emotion has something to do with your wish to be stronger and with your desire to play with your daughter, but it is hard to say what this episode of envy represents or that what it represents is metaphysically possible. What would have to be true of one's circumstance for this envy to be fitting? We might offer: it should be the case that you could have the sturdy boughs, it should be the case that you have more of a right to the sturdy boughs than the oak tree does, or that it fails to properly appreciate its sturdy boughs, or that it is your rival, or that it threatens to usurp your relationship with your daughter, and so forth. What makes this emotion feel

murky is not that it generates representations that happen to not ever be met by anything in reality, but that its representations cannot be met because they are of something metaphysically impossible.

In the case of emotions that feel murky like the one given above, the metaphysical impossibility seems to arise from concepts from disparate conceptual domains being mixed together in its representation. Your envy of the oak tree seems to involve the representation that you yourself are the sort of being that could have sturdy boughs, that the oak tree has less of a right to them than you do, and so forth. Even though one understands what it means to have a right and what an oak tree is, one cannot grasp what it means for an oak tree to have a right without radically revising either one's concept of right or one's concept of oak trees. Here, the concepts from the domain of the personal and the domain of the natural are mixed together, making for metaphysically impossible representations. Likewise, without revising our concept of a bough or our concept of a human being, we cannot understand what it would mean for a human being to have sturdy boughs. Here, concepts from the domain of the animal and the arboreal are mixed together, making for a metaphysically impossible formal object. The emotional episode is recognizably one of envy in that it makes a representation that involves the features characteristic of envy (*extremely roughly*, that you have a better right to something of value than its present possessor), but the representation is mixed together with the representation of features from a disparate conceptual domain.

Without insisting on it, I note one plausible psychological explanation of why we have emotions that make such metaphysically impossible representations, the *Confusions in Core Knowledge* theory. Core knowledge refers to the set of representations about various domains that develop in early childhood, apparently cross-culturally. For example, it is part of the core knowledge of 'naïve physics' that material things take up space and cannot pass through one another (Wellman and Gelman 1992, pp. 344–350), part of 'naïve biology' that only living things can become sick and die (Wellman And Gelman 1992, pp. 357–365), and part of 'naïve psychology' that only humans and other animals have minds. On this theory, confusions in core knowledge occur when a being of one domain is represented without some of the features of its domain or with features of other domains: e.g., a ghost as a body that can nevertheless pass through walls, magic as a sort of physical force that can be manipulated by speech acts, that an object or physical locality is diseased or evil, or that a forest is upset by the encroaching roads. For the most part, when these confusions in core knowledge arise, we end up representing things that depart not just from our 'naïve metaphysics' but from what is metaphysically possible on our mature views of metaphysics. Plausibly, just as confusions in core knowledge give rise to belief in ghosts, magic, and the like, they also give rise to non-paradigmatic emotions, e.g., in resenting the rain storm that soaks you as you are walking home, your resentment represents the rain storm as having mental states such as ill-will.

Of an emotional episode that represents a metaphysical impossibility, we might be tempted to say that its representation generates fittingness conditions, but that these can never be met in reality, and so that such emotional episodes are always overall unfitting. This would itself yield the conclusion (5) that I am aiming at. Rather, it seems we should make the stronger claim that the representations of these emotional episodes fail to give rise to fittingness conditions. By analogy, when we see someone hitting a wall with a hammer and they say to us 'I am punishing the atoms. I am making

an example of them' (Blatty 1980) our reaction is not simply that the speaker is saying something false. Rather, such a speaker seems to be failing to represent the idea of an atom (which implicitly carries the predicates 'not assessable for well-being,' 'not a moral agent'), or failing to represent the idea of that which can be punished (which implicitly carries the predicates 'assessable for well-being,' 'moral agent'), or, if representing both ideas, is representing something *logically impossible* through their conjunction.

One final alternative to the idea that paradigm emotions supply the fittingness conditions of their non-paradigmatic varieties might be that the latter have possible but simpler formal objects. For instance, perhaps the formal object of propositional gratitude is just (A) 'I got a benefit' and the formal object of quasi-targeted gratitude is just (A) conjoined with the representation that (A) has been brought about by some peculiar cause. I respond to this possibility in the next section.

Two Objections Answered

Simpler Fittingness Conditions

Two papers in the philosophical literature discuss the fittingness (or, as they term it, appropriateness) of gratitude for one's life, 'existential gratitude,' if no supernatural agents exist, one by Michael Lacewing and the other by Drew Chastain. Lacewing and Chastain offer similar fittingness conditions for existential gratitude that are simpler than those I have laid out for propositional gratitude. Lacewing states two conditions on the 'cognitive appropriateness' of existential gratitude:

First, existential gratitude represents existence as a good for the individual. This could only be inappropriate if existence is not a good... Second, existential gratitude represents existence as undeserved. This could only be inappropriate, for each person who feels existential gratitude, if they deserve to exist (Lacewing 2016, p. 157)

Chastain is slightly less explicit in formulating the fittingness conditions that he endorses, but seems to offer something very similar to Lacewing:

Feeling grateful is not so entirely about one's own good fortune, but is also directed toward the nature of that for which one is grateful. Framing life as gift is most resonant with the more spontaneous experiences in life, when we feel ourselves to be audience to life's creative wellspring, as with the spontaneity—or unforced thriving—of children, nature, and art (Chastain 2016, p. 642)

As I read these authors, Lacewing offers (i) the goodness of one's existence, (ii) the undeservedness of one's existence as the fittingness conditions of existential gratitude, whilst Chastain offers (a) that one has good fortune and (b) that this good fortune arrives spontaneously.

My objection to both these proposals is that they suffer from an underdetermination problem. The proposed fittingness conditions seem to be the same fittingness conditions as appreciation. If I have something good and did not have a desert-claim to it, it seems fitting that I be appreciative, or if I experience good fortune and its occurrence is spontaneous rather than a hard-slog it seems fitting that I be appreciative. At most, we might say that conditions (ii) and (b) pick out some special sharpening or elaboration or variety of appreciation, rather than that they pick out something other than appreciation.

This underdetermination problem is a problem for two reasons. First, it implies that in any circumstance in which one fittingly felt existential gratitude, one could fittingly feel appreciation instead, and vice versa, because they represent the same formal object. Yet, it is unintuitive that these states have precisely the same extension with regard to their fittingness. At the least, it seems uncontroversial to say that it is fitting to appreciate one's life if (i–ii) or (a–b) are true, whereas it is controversial to say that it is fitting to feel existential gratitude for one's life if (i–ii) or (a–b) are true.

Second, if Lacewing and Chastain are right that what they call existential gratitude makes this simpler representation, then it seems that unless we can adduce something that distinguishes existential gratitude from appreciation, then we should conclude that existential gratitude just is appreciation. Although perhaps many cases of existential gratitude are just misreported cases of appreciation (a difficult empirical matter on which I take no stand), charity to the self-reports of those who say that they feel existential gratitude rather than mere appreciation suggests that we grant that existential gratitude really does occur (and Lacewing and Chastain would certainly want to say so). Since we said that most emotions involve both cognitions and conations, one way of distinguishing the two might be to point to some desire that existential gratitude involves that appreciation does not, such as a desire to make a return. This is a plausible strategy, since it seems more apt to explain some instance of benevolent or pro-social behavior by saying 'I feel gratitude for my life, so I volunteer at the forest preserve' than by saying 'I feel appreciation for my life, so I volunteer at the forest preserve.' However, such a strategy defers explanation by raising the question of why some representations of (i–ii) and (a–b) but not others are accompanied by a desire of this kind, to which there seems to be no obvious answer. Instead, an explanation of why existential gratitude involves a desire of this kind is provided by the idea that existential gratitude involves the more complex but metaphysically impossible representations of the kind discussed in the previous section, e.g., that the universe is an agent which has given life, in response to which a desire to make a return to the universe is generated.

I note that the views of Chastain and Lacewing serve as a case in point for the second reason given for the PFP. That is, Chastain and Lacewing are right that existential gratitude is more fitting in light of the fact that one's life is a good rather than a bad, that the spontaneity with which the good things in life occur is distantly analogous to the unsolicited gift of a benefactor, that the undeservedness of these goods is distantly analogous to having got more than one could demand as a right. But, this judgment of there being some fittingness should be distinguished from a judgment of overall fittingness.

Quasi-Targeted and Propositional Gratitude Are Not Really Varieties of Gratitude

Tony Manela argues that what we call propositional gratitude is just appreciation (Manela 2016). If this is right, then it would be a mistake to assess the fittingness of apparent cases of propositional gratitude with the fittingness conditions of prepositional gratitude. This by itself would not undermine my conclusion that ‘All varieties of gratitude are only overall fitting when targeted towards agents’ but, if we extended his claim to include quasi-targeted gratitude as well, it would yield the result that ‘non-paradigmatic varieties of gratitude’ is an empty category.

I follow Walker and others in suggesting that the varieties of gratitude are unified by a desire to make a return. I take it as being uncontroversial that prepositional gratitude involves a desire to make a return. Walker gives the following case to show that propositional gratitude also involves a desire to make a return:

the shipwrecked seaman grateful to be cast ashore by a freak wave might express his gratefulness by action to benefit the local villagers, or his fellow-seamen or... almost anyone (Walker 1981, p. 50).

Manela challenges the claim that a desire to make a return is a part of what we call propositional gratitude with the following commentary on Walker’s case:

if Walker’s shipwrecked seaman survives his ordeal without any new care for or tendency to benefit anyone, he is not necessarily an ingrate. If he... never took his luck for granted, and subsequently lived each day to the fullest as long as he lived, we would still say he was grateful *that* he washed ashore, even if he never went on to “make a return” to anyone... Furthermore, we need not to refer to gratitude in order to articulate the difference between him and someone in a similar position who decides to “pay it forward.” The difference between them is easily explained by saying that the latter is more empathetic, generous, or big-hearted. (Manela 2016).

As I read him, Manela’s argument is that we correctly describe the seaman who feels what we call propositional gratitude as grateful even if he does not have a desire to make a return. Therefore, the desire to make a return cannot be a necessary part of what we call propositional gratitude, and so cannot unify it with prepositional gratitude. I share Walker’s intuition that we would find the seaman who does not desire to make a return to not be grateful, but rather ungrateful. I note two things that tend to favor Walker’s intuition over Manela’s.

Manela suggests that we can explain the behavior of the seaman who desires to benefit others (‘pay it forward’) by pointing to something other than a desire involved in what we call propositional gratitude, such as his being empathetic, generous, or big-hearted. I grant that we can do this. But if Manela is right that what we call propositional gratitude does not involve the desire to make a return, then he must make the stronger claim that it would be a mistake to explain the behavior of the seaman who desires to benefit others as this being what we call his propositional gratitude at work. That is, Manela must say that a claim like ‘I am grateful to have been cast ashore by a freak wave, so I desire to benefit...’ would be a non-sequitur. This seems unintuitive.

Similarly, Manela's claim conflicts with how we understand the role of what we call propositional gratitude in our own lives as something that can explain some of our desire to benefit others. This becomes most obvious in cases where a desire to benefit others aside from the desire to make a return cannot be assumed, e.g., 'I am grateful that I have a splendid wine-cellar, and therefore I desire to share my wine with guests' is more explanatory than 'I appreciate that I have a splendid wine-cellar, and therefore I desire to share my wine with guests.' To press the point further, gratitude and appreciation diverge in how we use them to explain the absence of a desire to benefit: 'I appreciate that I have a splendid wine-cellar, and therefore I do *not* desire to share my wine with guests' makes a good deal more sense than 'I am grateful that I have a splendid wine-cellar, and therefore I do *not* desire to share my wine with guests.'

To these remarks, Manela might respond that apparent cases of propositional gratitude *can* involve a desire to make a return, but that apparent cases of propositional gratitude need not necessarily involve a desire to make a return. In turn, I respond that even allowing that the desire to make a return is not a necessary part of propositional gratitude, it still might be one of the important cluster of properties that help constitute propositional gratitude. This alone would help distinguish propositional gratitude from appreciation. Intuitively, desiring to make a return does not mean that I am more appreciative, and so this is not one of the cluster of properties that helps constitute appreciation. By contrast, desiring to make a return does seem to mean that I am closer to feeling propositional gratitude, even if lacking the desire does not completely exclude me from feeling propositional gratitude.

Since this discussion is philosophical in nature, I take no stand on the empirical question of whether a large proportion what people report as propositional gratitude is in fact just misreported appreciation.

Conclusion

I have given an argument for the thesis that (5) 'All varieties of gratitude are only overall fitting when targeted towards agents.' I close with a clarification and an upshot.

(5) does not mean that the propositional or quasi-targeted gratitude felt for the beautiful sunset by those who deny the existence of supernatural agents is unfitting, since whether these episodes of gratitude are fitting or not turns upon whether some such supernatural agent actually exists or not. The discussion does however indicate that gratitude for the beauty of a sunset is only consistent if one believes in some such supernatural agent, and only warranted if one has sufficient evidence for the existence of some such supernatural agent. Likewise, according to (5), quasi-targeted gratitude towards things like mountains is unfitting unless some kind of animism on which mountains are agents is true.

This paper is not a piece of natural theology. However, John Bishop has alluded to the possibility of a Jamesian-style will-to-believe argument to make sense of existential gratitude (Bishop 2012, p. 250). Another model seems to be C.S Lewis' argument from desire, which proceeds by induction from the observation that all our natural desires have really existing objects to the conclusion that our spiritual desire has a really existing object (Lewis 1952). One could make the similar inference that since our other emotional episodes can be and often are fitting, so too is our gratitude for the beautiful

sunset. Given that practically every aspect of our world and our mental furniture has been utilized for the purposes of natural theology, it is somewhat surprising that our emotions largely have not been.

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