AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

THEORETICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology

ISSN: 1068-8471

https://doi.org/10.1037/teo0000355

Gratitude Without Otherness: The Neoliberal Drift of the Encouragement to Gratitude

Mar Rosàs Tosas

Blanquerna School of Health Sciences, Ramon Llull University

Gratitude is a positive emotion that most individuals experience when someone benefits them and which plays a fundamental role in personal relationships. Despite its ubiquity, the study of gratitude has occupied a relatively marginal role in the western tradition. It is true that several philosophers and theologians have devoted insightful reflections to it, and some psychologists have also done it, but few, if any, have made it central to their thought. However, the last two decades have witnessed an increasing attention to the study of the experience of gratitude. The terrain was opened up by the publication of the influential book *The Psychology of Gratitude* (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). One of its ideas started to circulate widely through a vast corpus of articles in positive psychology, self-help books, and posts on social media—that gratefulness contributes to happiness and to well-being and that this is a strong reason to try to feel grateful, the more often the better. The goal of this article is to examine this new account of gratitude through the views of highly influential motivational coach Tony Robbins to determine whether it complements the traditional western view on gratitude or whether they are rather mutually exclusive. In particular, the article argues that his account of gratitude, insofar as it promotes gratitude as an emotional technology to optimize one's well-being and productivity, shares a neoliberal logic and its corresponding notion of the self, which sets it apart from previous accounts of gratitude, which are other-centered.

Public Significance Statement

The present article explores the mutation of the experience of gratitude at the hands of positive thinking within neoliberalism. It argues that, while for the western philosophical tradition, gratitude had to do with acknowledging and thanking the *other*—the benefactor—because of the good impact he has on me, in the last 20 years, positive thinking has been encouraging gratitude for wholly different reasons—for the positive impact it has on *oneself*.

Keywords: gratitude, happiness, neoliberalism, Tony Robbins, well-being

Timothy Beck served as action editor.

Mar Rosàs Tosas https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7946-0306

The author thanks Pau Miquel Diego for his generous and insightful reading of a previous version of this article. The author also acknowledges Elizabeth Walz, who proofread the article.

Mar Rosàs Tosas played a lead role in conceptualization, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, writing–original draft, and writing–review and editing.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Mar Rosàs Tosas, Blanquerna School of Health Sciences, Ramon Llull University, C/Padilla 326, 08022 Barcelona, Spain. Email: mariadelmarrt1@blanquerna.url.edu

Gratitude is considered to be "the label for a favorite response to a gift or favor" (Leithart, 2014, p. 4). It is a positive emotion that most individuals experience many times throughout their lives when someone benefits them and which plays a fundamental role in personal relationships, since it contributes to the constitution of bonds to other people.

Despite its ubiquity and importance, the study of the notion and the experience of gratitude has occupied a relatively marginal role in the western tradition. It is true that several of the most influential western philosophers and theologians of the last 2,500 years have devoted insightful reflections to the notion of gratitude—several will be mentioned throughout this article—but few, if any, have made it central to their thought. It is true, also, that the experience of gratitude was central to the works of some psychologists, among which psychoanalyst Klein (2001) stands out. But this was the exception rather than the rule.

However, the last two decades have witnessed an increasing attention to the study of the experience of gratitude. It has not been by either philosophy nor by psychoanalysis but by positive psychology. The raison d'être of the present article is the fact that this sudden rise of interest in the study of gratitude and gratefulness is, in my view, for wholly different reasons than those claimed by those philosophers, theologians, and psychologists. The terrain was opened up by the publication of the highly influential book *The Psychology of Gratitude* (Emmons & McCullough, 2004), which examined and praised the benefits of experiencing gratefulness. Among the ideas the book put forward, one started to circulate widely across a vast corpus of articles in positive psychology, self-help books, and posts on the social media—the idea that gratefulness contributes to happiness and to well-being, and that this is a strong reason to try to feel grateful, the more often the better. These texts and videos insist, then, on the *psychological* advantages of feeling grateful and tend to propose and encourage a set of simple daily gratitude practices. This is new. In the western tradition, gratitude had been praised and encouraged but not for these reasons and not in this way. The titles of many of these self-help books are eloquent: *Living with Gratitude: A Journey that Will Change our Life* (Arrien, 2011), *Gratitude. … It's Like Glitter for your Soul*! (Holmes, 2014), or *Gratitude Journal: Invest few minutes a day to develop thankfulness, mindfulness and positivity* (Lalgudi, 2020).

The goal of the present article is to explore whether this account of gratitude promoted in social media complements and expands the previous works on gratitude by western philosophy, theology, and psychology or whether there is at stake something radically new. In particular, this article explores how this new view on gratitude reflects and promotes some logics proper to neoliberalism—a lifestyle and ideology that will described in detail—in which the self is understood as something that might be "self-managed" and "optimized" to become the more efficient the better. And it does so by particularly focusing on a concrete example: the promotion of gratefulness by highly influential psychological coach Tony Robbins. The ultimate purpose of the article is to ask whether the set of *psychological* benefits of gratefulness that are nowadays widely shouted from the rooftops are just another set of benefits that add to the *moral* and *epistemic* benefits the western tradition had already pointed out. Or whether, by contrast, the value of gratefulness according to this new gaze is, in fact, incompatible with the value that gratefulness had for the western tradition so far. In short, whether these two views on gratitude can potentially complement each other or, by contrast, whether they are, in fact, mutually exclusive.

The article will proceed as follows. In the Traditional Notion of Gratitude section, I will attempt to define gratitude and I will list and discuss what, according to the western philosophical tradition, are the conditions of possibility of gratitude. As we see, despite the obvious differences between the multiple authors who have addressed the topic since the beginning of the western philosophical tradition, there are a number of conditions that, for all of them, any experience of gratitude needs to meet for it to be gratitude. This first sectionis necessary, because it will be against this background that then, in the Neoliberalism and Gratitude section, we will ask ourselves whether the current account of gratitude promoted by advocates of positive thinking such as Tony Robbins continues with this tradition or rather breaks with it, and in which senses.

The Ethical and Epistemic Advantages of Gratitude section will address the benefits that gratitude entails according to philosophers, anthropologists, and theologians of the western

tradition. In my view, these benefits can be grouped together in two categories: *moral* advantages and *epistemic* advantages. This section will also include a note of a more negative type—it will also list the "dark side" of gratefulness.

The recent interest in gratitude by positive psychology will be explored in the Recent Interest in Gratitude by Positive Psychology section. The section will first describe the psychological benefits of feeling grateful that articles of positive psychology highlight, and it will then proceed to analyze the posts on gratefulness of Tony Robbins's blog, one of the most influential positive thinking coaches worldwide that relies on this theoretical corpus. This case study will allow me to exemplify how the theoretical insights of the aforementioned articles take a concrete form in social media. This section will be concluded by suggesting that this emphasis on the positive aspects of feeling grateful is nested into and informed by a neoliberal framework.

The Neoliberalism and Gratitude section will be devoted to neoliberalism—to how it can be defined and to how the pursuit of happiness encouraged by positive psychology tacitly allies with some of the beliefs about the human condition that neoliberalism rests upon, such as the responsibility for own's one fate and the idea that the self can be "self-managed" and "optimized." I will argue that the encouragement to feel grateful typical of positive thinking shares these neoliberal premises, and I will examine to which extent this means that this new account of gratitude has broken its ties to the western tradition's view on gratitude.

At this point, the following clarification needs to be made: The aim of this article is not to judge whether there are better or worse accounts of gratitude. It is rather to contribute to explain how the understanding of gratitude is being recast at the hands of a new sociocultural context, the neoliberal framework, giving rise to a new account of the phenomenon.

The Traditional Notion of Gratitude

What are we speaking of when we speak of gratitude? Almost everybody has the experience of feeling gratitude toward a benefactor, but within the history of western philosophy, there is little consensus on the *nature* of gratitude. For some, in particular, in antiquity and for most religions, gratitude is a *virtue* (Emmons & Cumpler, 2000). A moral virtue, some specify (McCullough et al., 2001). For others, gratitude is an *emotion* or an emotional state (Emmons & McCullough, 2004; Weiner, 1985). The term "disposition" is also often used to describe the nature of gratitude. For some authors, it is an "affective disposition" consisting of appreciating the nice aspects of life (Manela, 2022). Indeed, most religions conceive of it as a (highly prized) human *disposition* (McCullough et al., 2001, p. 249; McCullough et al., 2002; Wood et al., 2010, p. 891). But gratitude has also been consistently described as a *habit*, as a *state*, as a *coping strategy*, and as a *personality trait* (Dickens, 2017; McCullough et al., 2002, p. 195; Ding & Liu, 2022, p. 1200).

Regardless of their differences, all these theorists share the idea that gratitude is a *reaction* or a response to having been benefited by someone else. This reaction is a positive, happy one. One feels a "blend of admiration and joy" for the benefactor's action and for the fact this benefactor has tried to help (McCullough et al., 2001, p. 249; Manela, 2022, p. 3).

The notion of gratitude has not played a central role in the western philosophical tradition, although many of its most prominent representatives have addressed the phenomenon of gratitude, and it has played a relevant role at some key turning points of western thought. In classic antiquity, for example, mainly in Cicero and Seneca, but also in Aristotle,[1] or in scholasticism in the Medieval age, in particular, Aquinas.[2]

The notion of gratitude also occupied a prominent role in the theological reflections that lead to the Protestant Reformation, because Luther and Calvin were concerned about the lack of sense of gaining God's favors through the purchase of indulgences.[3] This was, in fact, one of

[1] Cicero (2023), in his *De officiis*, described gratitude as the greatest of the virtues and the parent of all the others. Among other reasons, because it creates bonds of obligations, and this might promote the common good. Later on, Stoic philosopher Seneca, in *De beneficiis*, praised gratitude, because it creates bounds of mutual dependence between individuals and wrote that ingratitude is an abomination. When arguing that, Seneca was writing against Aristotle, who exhorts individuals to recall more favors done than favors received, because otherwise, beneficiaries will feel too dependent on benefactors.

[2] Who turned to Seneca's to forge his own view on the importance of gratitude, in particular of gratitude toward God.

[3] In Leithart's words: "The Reformers attempted to restore the Bible's infinite circle of gift and gratitude" (Leithart, 2014: p. 9).

the reasons that lead them to carry out the reformation.

But the notion of gratitude also contributed to another very important tipping point in western history, this time in the political arena. According to Leithart's (2014, pp. 122–132), comprehensive study of gratitude as an intellectual category in the west, the political innovation of English empiricist John Locke (1632–1704), that actually lead to the opening up of political modernity, was clearly interwoven with gratitude. The argument goes as follows: Locke pushed away gratitude from the political arena and relegated it to the private sphere. The reason for such a gesture was that, to Locke, the authority of the sovereign should not stem from the debt and gratitude citizens felt toward him, because he has previously benefitted them, but from other sources—which are not the topic of this article.

On the other hand, social thinker Adam Smith (1723–1790), in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1790/1976), presented one of the first in-depth psychological treatments of gratitude. *And Immanuel Kant* (1724–1804), to mention a last titan of thought, referred to ingratitude as one of the three vices which "are the essence of vileness and wickedness" (Kant, 1963, p. 19). Also, several modern and contemporary Catholic and Protestant theologians have delved deep into the experience of gratitude, in particular, gratitude toward God (Kierkegaard, 2009; Hildebrand, 1980/2000; Bonhoeffer, 2006, McCabe, 2003; McConnell, 1993; McGill, 2013). In short, gratitude has played a discreet but relatively important role in the history of western thought. Leithart's (2014) *Gratitude: An Intellectual History* and Rushdy's (2020) *Philosophies of Gratitude* precisely allowed the reader to get a sense of the scope of this role.

While there is an ongoing debate on what gratitude is—whether a virtue, an emotion—among these philosophers and theologians, there seems to be a relatively strong consensus on which are the requisites of gratitude. In what follows, I will list the nine requisites that I have identified in my analysis of the western literature on gratitude. First, one feels gratitude when one *appreciates the benefit* received (Ding & Liu, 2022, pp. 1199–1204), that is, perceives it as valuable (Tesser et al., 1968; Wood et al., 2008, p. 891). This applies to everything one might receive: goods, favors, words.

But, in order to feel gratitude, one must also *perceive the good intention* of the benefactor. For many theorists, if someone benefitted you by accident or without being aware of it, you might feel happy and might even feel the desire to benefit the benefactor in the future, but there would be no reason to feel gratitude (Berger, 1975; Heider, 1958, p. 29; Walker, 1980–1981; McCullough et al., 2001, p. 252; Ding & Liu, 2022, pp. 1199–1204). When what is at stake is gratitude to God, theologians have also warned about the importance of distinguishing between valuing the gift and valuing the intentionality, that is, the goodness and love of God directed toward the benefactor (Hildebrand, 1980/2000, pp. 16–17). In this sense, "[t]o say 'thank you' is to say 'I think of you in this gift'" (McCabe, 2003; Dunnington, 2022, p. 10).

The third condition of possibility of gratitude is that, for the benefactor, the gesture was *costly* (Berger, 1975; Tesser et al., 1968, p. 29; Wood et al., 2008, p. 891; McCullough et al., 2001; Wood et al., 2010, p. 901). Analytic philosophy, so eager to set conditions of possibility, has argued that, in fact, the beneficiary only owes gratitude to the benefactor if the first has *sacrificed* something (McConnell, 1993, p. 11). Theologians have also stressed this point, which is clearly developed by Aquinas: "when the giver suffers in giving us a gift, we owe the giver a greater debt of gratitude than when the giver gives the gift without personal cost" (Kaczor, 2022, p. 10).

Moreover, gratitude implies *feeling joy*. This is an aspect that theologians have developed at length. Theologian Karl Barth, for example, argued that joy "is really the simplest form of gratitude" (Barth, 2010, pp. 376–377). Those who feel the joy typical of gratitude, several authors go on, also feel the need to *express this joy*. This is a point that Seneca already made: As a response to the nice gifts we receive, we should express our emotions in an unrestrained way.

This is connected to the fifth feature of gratitude that is often highlighted—the person who feels grateful, by expressing his or her joy, *acknowledges the good impact* that the benefactor has had on him. Gratitude revolves, then, around acknowledging the other's impact on oneself. This often leads beneficiaries to "honor" the benefactor. In Barth's words, "to be grateful is to recognise and honour as a benefactor the one who has conferred this good" (Barth, 2010, III/2, p. 167; Anderson, 2022, p. 3).

Moreover, the person who feels this joy and carries out this acknowledgement *is eager to benefit the person who has helped him and celebrates the good things that might happen to this person*. Manela summarized this sixth condition of possibility of gratitude in the following words: "a desire to see someone fare well and a motivation to benefit them" (Manela, 2022, p. 5). In this sense, gratitude does not only have to do with acknowledging a *past* gesture that benefits us. It also has to do with how we will treat the benefactor in the *future*. Across most writings on gratitude there is a consensus on this point: What counts is the wish to repay the favor, not if it finally is repaid. It is a matter of a disposition rather than of a deed. The scholastic theologians already pointed this out and, in doing so, aligned themselves in a genealogy that dates back to classic antiquity.[4] This also applies to gratitude to God, as many theologians have pointed out. Since God does not actually need anything, giving him something in return is actually impossible. The way to repay him, is, therefore, showing him our gratitude (Kaczor, 2022, p. 3).

The seventh requirement of gratitude is a little more controversial. Some writings on gratitude explicitly exclude it, but it is worth mentioning because most do include it. Gratitude is only at work, the argument goes, when one does something to us *beyond what we expected him to*. One might certainly feel *thankful* for the other having done his job well. But in order for someone to feel *grateful*, there must be something extraordinary at stake. For gratefulness to arise, the reason why the other benefited us is not that he owes us something. The reward needs to be more than expected (Ding & Liu, 2022, p. 1204). The soft version of this thesis argues that although this lack of expectation is not a requirement of gratitude, it does increase the likelihood of gratitude (Ortony et al., 1988).

Expectation is also interwoven with gratitude in a second way. We are arriving, now, at the eighth condition of possibility of gratitude I wanted to point out, which is fundamental for the argument I will hold in this article and so I will explain it in more detail. It can be summarized as follows: When the benefactor expects the beneficiary to repay, or to express that he feels grateful, the experience of gratitude diminishes (Watkins et al., 2006). Berger had already noticed that the "demand" for expressing gratitude actually diminishes the duty to show gratitude (Berger, 1975, p. 300). The more the benefactor expects that reward, the less grateful you will feel for it. This is the reason why, as Watkins et al. (2006) practically studied following psychologist Fritz Heider (1958), "indebtedness" and "gratitude" are two distinct emotional states.[5] Some authors who specialize in gratitude go so far as to state that benefitting someone in order to put him in debt is pathological (Berger, 1975, p. 304). In a similar vein, others hold that for it to be gratitude, the beneficiary must perceive that the benefactor acted in an altruistic way (Wood et al., 2008, p. 891).

The issue of whether favors must be repaid was much debated à propos Marcel Mauss's (1990/1950) *The Gift*, an anthropological exploration of the obligations to exchange properties, banquets, rituals, dances, children, and so on, between the peoples of what he called archaic societies in Polynesia, Melanesia, and the American Northwest that was published in the 1950s and circulated widely among western scholars. For Mauss, these societies were bound thanks to a wide range of exchange practices between individuals and clans that obligated the beneficiaries to honor the benefactors and to repay them, creating a perpetual cycle of exchanges that lead to a system that contributed to the creation of certain social hierarchies.

[4] For example, Aquinas defines the term gratitude as "recollecting the friendship and kindliness shown by others, and in desiring to pay them back, as Tully states (De invent. ii, p. 53)" (Aquinas, 1920, II-II: 80, 1)."

[5] In indebtedness, one feels one has the obligation to repay another as a response for the benefit he has received. In gratitude, one simply appreciates the favors received (Watkins et al., 2006). Seneca and Cicero already pointed this out—one can be grateful even if one cannot return the favor.

In this sense, if what is at stake is simply a relationship of exchange, there is no room for gratefulness. This is why, when somebody altruistically benefits us, which means that he does so with "no strings attached, with no desire to obligate us," it can be an insult to repay him (Berger, 1975, p. 302). This is consistent with the findings of a study that explored if paying back a gift or favor with another gift or favor is deemed as appropriate by the recipes of the first benefit in two different types of relationships: exchange relationships—which, by their nature, create an obligation to return—and communal relationships, that is, relationships of family members or other close people in which one tends to help the other when one identifies a certain need on his behalf. The two experiments carried out revealed that "the receipt of a benefit after the person has been benefited leads to greater attraction when an exchange relationship is preferred and decreases attraction when a communal relationship is desired" (Clark & Mills, 1979, p. 12).

When anthropologist Mary Douglas wrote the foreword to one of the editions of the book, she claimed that free gifts do not exist, because they always put you in debt—an idea that, later on, contemporary continental philosophy and postmodernism developed.[6]

Is it still gratitude when there is an expectation of return or of gaining something? There is a heated debate over this issue. And it is a fundamental question for our article. Protestant theologian Peter Leithart (2014), author of a comprehensive history of gratitude within the western tradition (2014), claimed that this has changed over the course of history and goes as far as to state that the history of western gratitude originates "in the clash and cooperation of two regimes of gift and gratitude—the Greco-Roman (especially Roman) and the Christian" (Letihart, 2014, p. 59). This is a very important insight for the present article. Although he does not put it this way, from his study of gratitude as an intellectual notion in the west, one can draw the conclusion that *gratitude practices in the west might be grouped together in two different categories—in the first, one benefits the other because one gains something by doing so; in the second, one is grateful in an altruistic manner*.

Let me develop his argument in some detail. According to his analysis, in Ancient Greece and Rome, society was conceived as the result of a number of relationships of exchange. Roman patronage was based precisely on this logic. High-status patrons had to protect their lower status clients and offer them advocacy in court. Clients, in exchange, had to honor them and provide them with services and goods. The glue of society was the debt that everybody contracted toward others through the gifts they received from others. Like in Mauss's account. The experience of this debt was, simultaneously, an experience of gratitude.

For Leithart, this view of social relationships was disrupted by the birth of Christianity, in particular, by Jesus and Paul's account of gratitude. Leithart (2014) developed the highly original thesis that Jesus was an ingrate, meaning that his teachings implied a rupture of the old circles of reciprocity that tied the Roman and the Jew societies and spread the idea that one has to give without expecting anything in return—because, ultimately, God will reward you one day.[7] Jesus freed the recipients, then, from debt burdens. Recipients, then, no longer had to make huge efforts to counterbalance the goods they had received. This is why Jesus could prioritize giving to the poor. He tried to dismantle, then, the whole fabric of favors and gifts that was the cement to the social cohesion of the Roman society—and of the societies Mauss explored. In Leithart's words: for Jesus and Paul, "[g]iving appears to be a linear selfless sacrifice, and gratitude does not curve back to the giver but branches out and the gift disseminates forever" (Letihart, 2014, p. 6).

In short, in the ancient regime of gratitude, gifts had to be repaid. There was at work the imperative of reciprocation, because gifts were given in order for the benefactor to gain something. In the contemporary account of gratitude, by contrast, the expectation of return precisely diminishes gratitude—or even makes it impossible. This is why Derrida, and Leithart after him, maintained that, in fact, Mauss did not talk about gratitude (Leithart, 2014, p. 2)—but about indebtedness. From Derrida's (1992) perspective, a gift is only a gift, if there is no calculation and no self-interest at work. And if there is, too, an absolute forgetfulness on behalf of the donor.

At this stage of the article, the ninth requirement of gratitude appears as obvious: One is grateful to someone else. Gratitude, then, is a *reaction to the action of another*. This benefactor might be a living being, but it might also be a divine figure.

But does there need to be another for gratitude to arise? This question is also fundamental for this article. As we explain in detail in the Neoliberalism and Gratitude section, in the account of gratitude that circulates more and more in social media, there seems to be almost no room for the other. Is this new? As we see then the minor role that the other has in those accounts of gratitude is certainly new. But right now, it must be pointed out that at least two other types of the experience of gratitude without the need of the existence of a benefactor have appeared in the western tradition for a long time. First, in the so-called cosmic gratitude, in which one can simply feel thankful for the positive and beautiful aspects of life (Wood et al., 2010, p. 891). And, second, because, as Manela (2022) had originally and

[6] In particular, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion. See also Caputo and Scanlan's *God, the Gift, Postmodernism* 1999.

[7] As he explains, in the Torah, "the relationship between wealthy benefactor and poor recipient is always a triangular one: Yahweh, as it were, secures both loan and repayment" (Leithart, 2014, p. 68).

convincingly argued, one can be grateful to a benefactor whose existence you doubt. This applies to God, of course, but the hypothetical case he examined in detail was not theological. [8]

In short: Despite these two exceptions, the nine requirements of gratitude listed so far reveal that gratitude *revolves around the other*—the other's intention, the other's effort, the eagerness to express one's joy to the benefactor, the wish to see the benefactor fare well, and so on.

The Ethical and Epistemic Advantages of Gratitude

In the western tradition, wherever the notion of gratitude shows up, it is praised. With very few exceptions—such as Aristotle's hesitating attitude toward gratitude mentioned in a footnote above—the experience of gratitude is praised, because it is considered to be extremely beneficial. In this short section, I would like to describe these benefits of gratitude highlighted by philosophers, anthropologists, theologians, and some psychologists, to, then, in the Recent Interest in Gratitude by Positive Psychology section, see what positive psychology has added in this regard.

In my view, the benefits of gratitude praised by the western tradition can be classified as either moral or epistemic. When it comes to the moral advantages, there is an ongoing discussion of whether the moral dimension of gratitude has been acknowledged enough. For example, Berger (1975), in his study on gratitude, argues that one of the reasons that gratitude has been largely neglected by philosophy is that its role in morality has been neglected. I do not think this is actually the case. Philosophers and anthropologists had already highlighted that gift-giving, and the gratitude it leads to, "forge[s] a bilateral, irreversible bond[s]" that enhance solidarity (Mauss, 1990/1950, p. 59). In fact, the moral dimension of gift-giving was precisely one of the reasons that drew Mauss's attention, indebted to his uncle Durkheim and to his interest in the moral role of social rules, to the exchange practices of "archaic" societies.

But the moral dimension of gift-giving has not only been vindicated by anthropologists. Adam Smith (1790/1976), for example, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, already developed the idea that feeling gratitude contributes to social cohesion, because as Simmel (1950, p. 388) would develop in the 20th century, the feeling of gratitude tends to lead to the obligation to reciprocate—or, when this is not possible, to perpetual faithfulness. A similar point has also been made by Jewish thought—for example, Chalier illustrated the moral role of gratitude with the example of Jews that were welcomed in England and who, to express their "debt of gratitude" to their Christian compatriots, enrolled in the army to fight in World War I (Chalier, 2020, p. 263). In short, gratitude has been said to contribute to the formation and maintenance of helping relationships (Algoe et al., 2008; Ding & Liu, 2022, p. 1199).

Interestingly, scholars hold, feeling grateful does not only promote the beneficiary to behave well toward the benefactor, but, often, *also toward others* (Chalier, 2020, p. 166; Leithart, 2014). This is also a widespread view among theologians: Gratitude toward God "issues in love for the poor and needy" (Dunnington, 2022, p. 8).

It is true, however, that the last decades have witnessed a substantial increase in the study of the moral dimension of gratitude. Psychologist Michael A. McCullough is probably the most important representative of this trend. We shall go back to him later, because he is also one of the promoters of gratitude for the personal well-being it brings about. Right now, though, we are interested in him, because he has also put emphasis on the moral dimension of gratitude. He summed it up as follows: "Gratitude is both a response to moral behavior and a motivator of moral behavior" (McCullough et al., 2001, p. 250). This is so because, as he attempts to demonstrate, gratitude plays three relevant functions in social interactions. First, it operates as a moral barometer because it is a response to the acknowledgment of the benefactor's good intentions. Second, it motivates the beneficiary

[8] He addresses the case of a person who has survived wreckage and is alone in a desert island, and it seems as if somebody was helping him survive by facilitating the appearance of some tools and food from time to time. It could be a matter of simple luck, but the person in question suspects someone is actually looking after him. Suddenly, the island's volcano explodes and he is rescued at the last minute. Manela explains that this person feels very concerned about his potential benefactor—whose existence he doubts—and goes so far as to wish such a benefactor has never existed and is therefore not being burnt by the dramatic fire. These emotions, Manela goes on, are typical of a person who feels grateful: wishing the best to those who have helped us.

to act prosocially toward benefactors in the future—"partially in hopes of eliciting gratitude from the beneficiary" (McCullough et al., 2001, p. 258). And, third, as long as the grateful person expresses her gratitude to the benefactor, it reinforces the benefactors to behave prosocially in the future. For these reasons, McCullough goes so far as to conclude that gratitude is a "*moral* affect" (Emmons & McCullough, 2004).

Yet gratitude plays a relevant role in morality in a second sense that was, indeed, the subject matter of Berger's work (1975). In his words: "If I am the recipient of another's benevolence, his action indicates he cares about me, he values me, he respects me" (Berger, 1975, p. 301).

In my view, when philosophers and theologians praise gratitude, they do so not only because of these moral advantages but also because of its *epistemic* advantages. The reason is that gratitude denotes that one is *aware* of the other's impact on him or her. Gratitude, then, stems from *interpreting* data in a certain way which leads to *understanding* how the world works. Psychologists rather put it in terms of "recognition" or "appreciation" (McCullough et al., 2001, p. 251). And theologians tend to say that to "be grateful is to *recognise* a benefit" (Barth, 2010, p. 167) or to "acknowledge" God's imprint (Chalier, 2020). But the core idea is the same: Gratefulness is a form of knowledge. Although this idea is not explicitly developed in the western literature on gratitude, some theologians also put it clearly.[9]

In other words, gratefulness is inextricably related to *awareness*. And to an awareness of a specific type—to understanding that one's success is indebted to another person's action. In other words, the traditional account of gratitude implies the *acknowledgment of interdependence*. This implies a certain notion of the self—the grateful self is humble. This humility is crucial to the philosophical and anthropological views on gratitude, but it occupies a particularly relevant place within the theological accounts. For theologians who have addressed gratitude, gratitude to God has to do with an awareness of *how relationships work*. For Hildebrand, for example, gratitude stems from the belief that very little, if anything, is one's own merit (Hildebrand, 1980/2000, p. 17). But, for theology, gratitude also contributes to share light to *how the human being is constituted*. For Karl Barth, for example, "human being is eccentric": The source of his life is outside of himself, in God (Barth, 2010, pp. 164–166; Anderson, 2022, p. 5). Whatever you receive, and from whom you receive it, it comes from God. It is within gratitude that this awareness comes to light. In short, it is because of its epistemic advantages that gratitude contributes to dismantle the myth of the independent self that is sovereign of itself—which we see in the Neoliberalism and Gratitude section.

But, when gratitude is at stake, not everything that glitters is so gold. Gratitude might also have a dark side. For the purpose of this article, it is only necessary to mention these dangerous aspects of gratitude briefly, but the references of extensive studies on the topic will be provided for those who wish to delve deeper into them.

First, gratitude sets an asymmetry. The one who receives might feel inferior and in debt. And it might not simply be a feeling, but a reality—gratitude might become "unhealthily servile" (McConnell, 1993, p. 11). But, as many of the scholars who specialize in gratitude argue, this is getting things wrong. Feeling grateful does not need to lead to shame, and if one feels shameful because of it, it is because of his pride and his denial of our constituent dependency (Hildebrand, 2000, pp. 35, 37). In fact, others argue, the beneficiary is not inferior, because if seen from the lenses of Hegel's logic between the slave and the master, the master's prestige precisely depends on the slave's position (Chalier, 2020, p. 266).

Second, the obligation to reciprocate discussed above. In many contexts, the asymmetry tends to be unbearable, and this leads the beneficiary to try not to let this asymmetry open for too long by reciprocating as soon as he can and reestablishing a symmetry, and hence balance and harmony, between the two parts (Chalier, 2020, p. 16, p. 163). This imperative to repay is what, according to Mauss, makes the gift "dangerous to take" (Mauss, 1990/1950, p. 59). It is no coincidence, he argues, that the Germanic root for the word "gift" means both "gift" and "poison": A gift carries with it a dangerous poison. Philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) had already noted this danger: for him, receiving a gift "puts a man into the estate of desperate debtor. … For benefits oblige; and obligation is thraldom; and unrequitable obligation, perceptual thraldom;

[9] For example: "When we give thanks to God, it becomes easier to *know* and love God" (Kaczor, 2022, p. 8).

which is to one's equal, hateful" (Hobbes cited in Greenberg, 1980, p. 17).

Third, the help from others might provoke resentment (Hildebrand, 1980/2000, p. 38). Fourth, gratitude might lead to what is called the "gratitude paradox": In certain situations in life, you are expected to be grateful for what you *already* have been given, and this implies you are not supposed to ask for more. The pressure to feel grateful for having a job in a context of financial crisis, even if it is underpaid, is a good example of this phenomenon. In this context, complaining is read as illegitimate and typical of ingrate people, who do not appreciate things as is due (Chisholm-Burns & Formica, 2024).

The last challenging aspect of gratitude I have identified is the insistence to be grateful even if one is going through dramatic circumstances. This has historically been a pretty common object of debate among theologians (Hildebrand, 1980/2000; Barth, 2010; Bonhoeffer, 2006; Chalier, 2020, p. 276; Anderson, 2022; Dunnington, 2022). For some, one is to feel grateful for the good things of life and for God's love *despite* one's suffering. For others, one is to feel also grateful *for* this very suffering, as Aquinas, for example, posed (Aquinas, 2020). There is no consensus, then, on this very sensitive point. A similar discussion has been recently taking place among psychologists, because, for some, one is to be grateful even for the most traumatic circumstances because they might lead to "posttraumatic growth." But Aquinas' point is different: One has to feel grateful to God even for the suffering because "gratitude to God is part of giving to God what is due to God as our creator" (Kaczor, 2022, p. 3).

Despite these undeniably challenging aspects of gratitude, an analysis of the literature on the topic reveals that its moral and its epistemic advantages outnumber its shortcomings. The next session is devoted to explaining that, on top of these *moral* and *epistemic* advantages, there might also be *psychological* benefits at stake, which psychology has been studying since the early 2000s. Do these psychological benefits add to the moral and epistemic? Or are they rather incompatible with them?

Recent Interest in Gratitude by Positive Psychology

Is it true that gratitude is a new topic of study by psychology? Some of the scholars quoted throughout the two previous sections hail from psychology, although they are surely a minority. Moreover, the starting point of the psychologists that, since the early 2000s, have made gratitude the central focus of their research, is their astonishment that gratitude, despite being central to several philosophical and theological traditions, has been largely neglected by scholars in the social science of psychology, anthropology, and sociology (McCullough et al., 2001, p. 249). But highly influential psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1957/2001) devoted a full book to the idea that the experience of gratification that the baby has when he is well fed by her mother's breast, understood as a prototype of maternal goodness and generosity, is crucial for his later emotional well-being, specially to mitigate destructive impulses, such as envy and greed, and to appreciate goodness in others and trust them (Klein, 1957/2001, pp. 16–18).

The psychological studies of gratitude since the early 2000s, though, do not focus on this primary form of gratitude and its benefits but rather on the benefits of daily practices of gratitude. This insistence on the benefits of gratitude is part of a larger move by positive psychology to promote "flourishing"—the idea that life should be lived fully, and that this requires finding meaning and purpose in one's life, forging good relationships, experiencing positive emotions, and reaching a sense of accomplishment (Keyes & Haidth, 2003). In order to achieve these ends, "positive psychology interventions" are designed. They consist of daily practices that, if one does consistently, are supposed to make you feel happier in the long run.

What concerns us here is that, for several positive psychologists, experiencing gratefulness might precisely be provoked by one of these "interventions" that precisely contributes to this "flourishing." The psychological advantages of these "gratitude interventions" have been the focus of numerous studies in the last years by positive psychology, in particular, by one of its branches, the so-called "gratitude studies." The terrain was opened up by McCullough (2001; 2002) and gave rise to his highly influential book titled *The Psychology of Gratitude* (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). Although its authors did not define themselves as "positive psychologists," they acknowledged that the book contributes to the growing positive psychology initiative, as long as it promotes feeling positive emotions as a means to feel happier.

For McCullough, gratitude is fundamentally an emotion, and an emotion of a particular sort: It has the particularity of promoting moral, prosocial behavior—when one feels grateful, one wishes to be kind to the benefactor and, often, beyond. In this sense, gratitude studies seem to be highlighting the moral advantages of feeling grateful described above. But there is more to that. In a wide range of studies, gratitude studies explored how feeling grateful makes one feel happier. Without a doubt, theologians had already warned that genuine gratitude toward God leads to "true happiness" (Hildebrand, 1980/2000, p. 22). But positive psychology goes into a number of details on daily happiness and well-being that were totally alien to theology. Gratefulness, they argue, facilitates better sleep, decreases the risk of psychiatric conditions, and increases one's general well-being (Bono et al., 2004; Kendler et al., 2003; Wood et al., 2010). And, as had already been studied for other positive emotions such as happiness, leads to a better health (King, 2001) and to live longer (Chen et al., 2024).

Drawing on this research, clinical interventions are being designed to promote gratitude as a means to enhance the population's health. Several studies explored the best strategies to achieve the potential good effects of this so-called "gratitude interventions." The findings suggested that counting one's blessings, keeping a gratitude diary, writing gratitude letters, and doing gratitude visits were effective tools (Emmons & Cumpler, 2000; Dickens, 2017; Kashdan et al., 2006; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006; Wood et al., 2010, p. 193). In order for the impact of these interventions to be properly measured, different types of gratitude questionnaires and scales have been developed—for example, the unifactorial gratitude questionnaire, the Multifactorial Appreciation Scale, and the multifactorial gratitude, appreciation, and resentment test.

The physiological basis of gratitude is also being studied. Imaging tests revealed, for instance, that the experience of gratitude correlates with increased brain activity in the medial prefrontal cortex, in the left superior parietal lobule and in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, and with an increased release of dopamine (Saxe & Kanwisher, 2003; Karns et al., 2017).

The psychological benefits of being grateful circulate widely across self-help books and social media. Interestingly, this is so despite Dickens (2017), in his extensive meta-analysis of the literature on the psychological benefits of gratitude, concluded that its unique benefits have been overemphasized.[10] For example, he denied that gratefulness has a positive impact on physical health (Dickens, 2017, p. 202).

In order to see the current account of gratitude generally promoted by self-help books and social media, let us turn to what can serve us as a case study—Tony Robbins's website. Robbins is just one of the hundreds of promoters of gratitude within social media. In this article, for a matter of space, we focus only on his account of gratitude, but the reader can find very similar statements on dozens of websites, such as "Grateful living" (2025) or https://positivepsychology.com (Sauber, 2025).

A preliminary consideration. The study of gratitude by positive psychology is a serious enterprise. We do not aim to demerit it. It is true that, as we see in the Neoliberalism and Gratitude section, it sets itself apart from previous approaches to gratitude, but its findings are important. What concerns us here is that a number of self-help books and posts on social media nurture themselves from these studies, often offering an oversimplified version that focuses exclusively on the personal benefits of gratitude. And that it is precisely in these self-help books and posts, such as the ones by Tony Robbins, that gratitude is understood in almost exclusively neoliberal terms, as we see in the Neoliberalism and Gratitude section.

Tony Robbins is an American coach and motivational speaker who gives advice on how to achieve the life one wishes to lead by "taking immediate control of your mental, emotional, physical and financial destiny," as the cover of

[10] As his extensive study of previous studies on the topic revealed, when affirming that the experience of gratefulness generates well-being, two important points should be taken into account. First, that the studies that conclude that these gratitude practices increase well-being are only those in which a "gratitude intervention" is compared to a "negative intervention" (i.e., asking people to write down bad experiences they had the previous they). That is, gratitude interventions failed to generate significant benefits when compared to "neutral conditions." Second, Dickens (2017) argues, while it is true that gratitude interventions might have some positive effects, his study concludes that these positive effects are not higher than the ones that other positive psychology interventions have, such as "performing acts of kindness, imagining one's best possible, or using signature strengths" (Dickens, 2017, p. 201).

one of his books reads. He is also the author of several self-books, among which the best selling *Awaken the Giant Within* (Robbins, 1991) and *Unlimited Power* (Robbins & McClendon, 1997) must be mentioned. Let us see in detail the view on gratitude he deploys in his website (Robbins, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). Among the hundreds of posts on why and how to nurture certain emotions, some are devoted to the benefits of gratefulness. Within them, Robbins urges his readers to appreciate the beauty of life and to feel grateful for it as an antidote to their negative emotions and a catalyst for their material success. Robbins highlights that his advice is based on the findings of neuroscience concerning the positive effects of being grateful. There is a whole "physiology of gratitude," he claims, that involves the activation of certain neurochemicals and the vagus nerve, leading to an increased state of well-being.

In his words:

> Research confirms the neuroscience of gratitude: … When we express thankfulness, our brain's neural circuitry releases a cocktail of dopamine and serotonin, feel-good neurochemicals that foster optimism, camaraderie, willpower and positive emotions. … [T]op psychological scientists have shown that grateful people tend to experience greater happiness, improved physical health, and more fulfilling relationships.

The positive impact of feeling grateful, he goes on, does not limit to simply "feeling happier." Although he does not provide the source of these affirmations, he is sure that the "benefits can spread to other areas of life, such as better work performance, marital quality, and even income levels." The benefits that the practice of gratitude might have for one's success at work are the topic of his post "Gratitude in the workplace." He writes:

> Research underscores the potential impact of gratitude in the workplace on outcomes ranging from employee retention to time management to running a successful business. … In studying gratitude in the workplace, we encounter a subtle irony: By choosing thankfulness, our business becomes stronger, not weaker.

After affirming that, he hastens to calm down the audience by clarifying that being grateful for what you already have in the *present* will not block the *future* growth of your business: "[r]ecognizing the power of appreciation in business doesn't mean you stagnate. You can strive for growth while also appreciating the abundance you currently have," he adds. In this way, Robbins prevents his framework from being trapped into the aforementioned "gratitude paradox": The idea according to which feeling grateful might prevent you from striving for more.

For Robbins, the good news is that everyone can feel grateful. Robbins presents it as a matter of choice. You decide what you feel, you orchestrate your emotions. After all, he argues, there are always reasons to feel grateful—"the warmth of sun on your skin, the colors of autumn leaves, or the melody of your favorite song."

Changing the habits of the mind is not easy business, he acknowledges. The reason is that "we have a 2-million-year-old brain that is not designed to make us feel happy. It's designed to help us survive, constantly looking for what's wrong as a means to protect us." But, with effort and consistency, our conservative brain can be "rewired" in the "right" way. Certain practices can contribute to it. Robbins, aligned with the aforementioned literature on positive psychology, suggests some, among which keeping a gratitude journal and writing gratitude letters occupy a prominent place.

Robbins also calms down the audience by warning that expressing gratitude does not put you in an inferior position, as some philosophers had suggested and we mentioned above. Unavoidably, the experience of gratitude opens up an asymmetry between the benefactor and the recipient of the benefit. The grateful person feels *in debt*. For reasons that Robbins does not develop, he thinks his readers could find this threatening. And, therefore, he clarifies his point: "Get rid of any beliefs that being grateful makes you weak—the gift of gratitude actually makes you much stronger."

In short, Robbins's view on gratitude could be summarized as follows:

1. You should be as thankful as possible.
2. Because feeling grateful makes you feel good, as neuroscience reveals,
3. And have more material successes in life.
4. You can simply choose to feel grateful. It is a matter of choice.
5. And do not be afraid that expressing gratitude puts you in an inferior position—it does not.

Gratitude is presented, then, as a sort of emotional imperative potentially applicable by everybody regardless of the luck one has had in

life. The idea that being grateful is an "instrument available to everybody" to enhance one's health circulates widely, as a recent article in a newspaper in Barcelona emphasized (Aymerich, 2025).

This account of gratitude breaks, then, with the traditional idea according to which the more privileged and luckier you are, the more grateful you might feel—with the exception of some scholastic accounts, such as Aquinas', as mentioned above. Indeed, Robbins not only holds that miserable people can also feel grateful, but goes so far as to present being miserable as a blessing because of its potential to be a pathway to change one's mental life. In his words: "But what if every problem was a gift? What if the pain and problems were divine timing? What if every challenge we encounter, every problem we face, is an invitation?" He encourages readers, then, to view their traumas in life as an occasion for posttraumatic growth, a view typically held by positive psychology, as he exemplifies with the story of a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp who was able to feel grateful *for everything*.

Are the psychological advantages of feeling grateful pointed out by Robbins another set of advantages that add to the moral and epistemic advantages described above? Or do they rather overshadow the moral and epistemic advantages? This is how a soft criticism could go. But a hard criticism would rather argue that the advantages of gratitude highlighted by some coaches of positive psychology oust the other advantages, because they are mutually exclusive. In my view, this is the case. To put it in few words: While the epistemic and moral advantages of gratitude have to do with acknowledging that human beings are nested into a net in which help flows from and to multiple directions, the encouragement of gratitude by Robbins belongs to a neoliberal way of conceiving existence in which one's own well-being is one's responsibility and one's own merit.

In the next section, I first attempt to define what is meant by "neoliberalism" to then develop the idea that Robbins's encouragement to express gratitude participates in the neoliberal logic.

Neoliberalism and Gratitude

Positing origins is always difficult business. The origins of neoliberalism are often traced back to the founding of the Mont Pelerin Society in 1947 by Austrian economist Friedrich August von Hakey or, even further, to the Swiss economist (Ganti, 2014; Honegger, 1925; Steger & Roy, 2010). Regardless, though, of its founding moment, neoliberalism most commonly refers to a set of financial policies that were gradually implemented across the globe since the 1970s and that stem from the belief that economic power and control have to be transferred from governments to private markets. The gradual implementation of neoliberalism went hand in hand with an unprecedented increase in consumption and, to put it in few words, people felt neoliberal policies were making their lives better (Centeno & Cohen, 2012, pp. 318–319).

In the 1990s, this view enjoyed a pretty broad consensus. But soon its analysis revealed that these policies promoted inequality (Williamson, 2003). However, although neoliberalism was heavily contested, the predominant economic discourse keeps enthroning neoliberalism for want of an alternative system (Centeno & Cohen, 2012, p. 332).

It must be pointed out that, as Larner (2009) and Mudge (2008) argued, and Centeno and Cohen (2012) the term neoliberalism does not only refer to this debate concerning how the economy should work. The term is also used to refer to a whole ideology or system of thought that goes hand in hand with this economic view. For the purpose of this article, it is this last meaning that primarily concerns us. When the term neoliberalism is used in the sense we are now interested in, that is, to describe an ideology and the lifestyle it impels people to adopt, it is most commonly used *negatively* to criticize how certain institutions promote individual entrepreneurialism at the expense of the state's responsibility (Bourdieu, 1998; Ganti, 2014; Ortner, 2011, p. 93). This phenomenon has been extensively studied by anthropologists, philosophers, and psychologists. They claim that the neoliberal view on life rests upon the premise that you are (almost) solely responsible for your own fate (Cabanas, 2018, p. 6; Teo, 2018, p. 586; Adams et al., 2019, p. 203; Azevedo et al., 2019, p. 60). Your successes are your merit, and your strokes of bad luck are your fault. Lead to its ultimate consequences, then, you are responsible for providing health assistance, education, and housing to yourself and your family. Also, for picking the right people in your life and having a nice job. Psychologists have argued that, by extending this lifestyle and this understanding

of life, "[n]eoliberalism has managed to make itself invisible by becoming common sense" (Sugarman, 2015, p. 103).

The view on life proper to neoliberalism has a further ingredient: The imperative of being productive. This does not only apply to the workplace but also to social relationships and to leisure time. Time is scarce and is presented as an asset that one has to invest properly. For a neoliberal mindset, laziness is for losers. Hence, the fact that critiques of neoliberalism celebrate laziness, sleep, and boredom (Byung-Chul, 2015/2010; Crary, 2014; Valls Boix, 2022).

And, last but not least, the neoliberal ideology has impacted psychological experience to the extent that it has given rise to a certain notion of the self (Adams et al., 2019). Or, as others have put it, there are "elective affinities" between psychological traits and neoliberalism (Beattie et al., 2019).[11] Psychologists and philosophers, drawing on Marxism and Foucault among others, have examined how the production relations of a given society give rise to certain form of subjectivity and how most "humans adapt, (ful)fill, and actively 'suture' into these forms," of which the *homo neoliberalus* is the current form in the west (Teo, 2018, pp. 583–584).

The first remarkable feature of this neoliberal self is that it conceives itself as sovereign of itself, that is, as independent from others, "radically abstracted" from social and material context, and as master of his own fate (Adams et. al., 2019). Obviously, the neoliberal self is inspired by the notion of self proper to Locke's liberalism (Locke, n.d./1689). But, lead to its extreme consequences, the neoliberal sense is a proud self that disregards the positive impact that others have on his life and that is deeply individualistic because individualism is believed to be a way to happiness (Cabanas, 2018, p. 9). Accordingly, the other is regarded as a *means*: either as an *instrument* for one's well-being or as an *obstacle* for it.[12]

The second trait of this self is that it can be mold through a number of what Foucault labeled "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1988). That is, everyday behavior and emotions can and must be regulated, and one can be trained to do this properly. Within the frame of neoliberalism, in order for selves to adapt as much as possible to the logic of productivity and responsibility proper to neoliberalism, selves need to be sculpted so that their psychological capital is used "on the basis of calculations of investment and return." Life becomes, then, an "enterprising endeavor" (Binkley, 2017, p. 41) and myself becomes an "enterprising entity" (Teo, 2018, p. 585; Adams et al., 2019, pp. 191–195). In other words, individuals have become "entrepreneurs of themselves." As psychologists have argued:

> They conceive of themselves as a set of assets—skills and attributes—to be managed, maintained, developed, and treated as ventures in which to invest. As enterprising subjects, we think of ourselves as individuals who establish and add value to ourselves through personal investment (in education or insurance), who administer ourselves as an economic interest with vocabularies of management and performativity (satisfaction, worth, productivity, initiative, effectiveness, skills, goals, risk, networking, and so forth), who invest in our aspirations by adopting expert advice (of psychotherapists, personal trainers, dieticians, life coaches, financial planners, genetic counselors). (Sugarman, 2015, p. 104)

Positive psychology strongly contributes to shape the selves in this neoliberal fashion by teaching strategies for "purposefully and willfully" commanding emotional states (Sugarman, 2015, p. 110; Adams et al., 2019).[13] Sugarman concluded his review on the topic by saying that "there is ample evidence that (positive) psychologists are operating in ways that sustain and promote the globally dominant neoliberal agenda" (Sugarman, 2015, p. 115). In promoting a certain notion of the self, it becomes clear that positive psychology is "characterized by a narrow sense of the social as well as by a strong individualistic bias that reflects the core beliefs of neoliberal ideology" (Cabanas, 2018, p. 3).

In other words, neoliberalism and positive psychology, then, become tacit allies: The imperatives of neoliberalism are spread unintentionally by counselors, coaches, and self-help books on how to rewire your brain to become more productive and happier (Pitts-Taylor, 2010;

[11] With cultural differences depending on the territory, since "neoliberalism, a globally dominant ideology, adapts itself to different cultural contexts", as a study in Hong Kong, India, and the United States concluded (Beattie et al., 2019, p. 23).

[12] As studies on how neoliberalism triggers anti-immigrant attitudes, especially when immigrants are low-skilled, reveal (Igarashi & Ono, 2022). Along a similar vein, others have studied that neoliberalism "fosters indifference to the plight of the poor" (Azevedo et al., 2019, p. 60).

[13] In fact, these authors considered that it is not only positive psychology that does that but also other currents of psychology.

Sugarman, 2015). To get a taste of how these books sound—Seligman, the author of one of the self-help books that had circulated more widely, explained:

> Optimists do much better in school and college, at work and on the playing field. They regularly exceed the predictions of aptitude tests. When optimists run for office, they are more apt to be elected than pessimists are. Their health is unusually good, they age well, much freer than most of us from the usual physical ills of middle age. Evidence suggests they may even live longer. (Seligman, 2006, p. 5)

This cultivation of certain attitudes and emotions is promoted by two different sets of agents, whose action is, indeed, clearly interwoven. On the one hand, it is the very individuals that carry out a number of practices to try to forge a self that is resilient and optimizes its own psychological capital to increase their productivity (Pykett et al., 2017, pp. 12–13). As Byung-Chul (2015/2010) put it, the predominant model of this phenomenon is no longer that of an employer who pushes the individual to behave in certain ways that lead to an increased productivity, but the individual who voluntarily and happily squeezes himself in order to do so, thereby becoming simultaneously his own victim and perpetrator.

Yet, on the other hand, several institutions play a relevant role in the promotion of certain types of self. Schools are a clear example of this phenomenon. For example, the fact that they are more and more committed to teaching "skills" than "content" has to do with their will to equip individuals to navigate efficiently a flexible market.[14] These practices of "neuroeducation" are being fiercely criticized by voices that point out the dangerous side of this use of the findings of positive psychology (Cabanas, 2018; Ehrenreich, 2010) and argue that this:

> Is entirely consonant with a social and political imaginary that marginalises structural explanations for poor mental health, welfare and wellbeing. Instead, citizens are expected to psychologically adapt to, accommodate and "bounce back" from—in resilient ways—the more damaging effects of neoliberalism. (Pykett et al., 2017, p. 13)

Within this context, there seems to be no room for questioning and modifying the socioeconomic context. "New nihilism" refers, precisely, to this typically neoliberal idea that you can change yourself, but not the context (Teo, 2018, p. 593).

What concerns us here is that the critics of the dangers of the neoliberal promotion of certain emotions have focused on a wide range of emotions but have neglected gratitude. Perhaps because of its "kindness," gratitude is not usually identified as belonging to this group of emotions fostered by neoliberalism. One of the points of the present article is precisely to claim that gratitude is mutating at the hands of self-help books and motivational coaches, such as Robbins, to serve the neoliberal logic.

In which aspects is this neoliberal account of gratitude different from the western traditional account of gratitude described in the Traditional Notion of Gratitude and the Ethical and Epistemic Advantages of Gratitude sections? And which are the dangers of this neoliberal use of gratitude?

For almost all western scholars who have addressed gratitude, gratitude is vertebrated around otherness. It revolves around the other. As we have seen when listing the nine conditions of possibility of gratitude, the beneficiary acknowledges the other's good intentions, the good impact he has on his life, shows him one's good feelings toward him because of that, and wishes to see him fare well. In other words, for the western tradition of gratitude, what is central is the other, not one's self. In fact, Jewish philosopher Chalier went as far as to state that "saying thanks breaks me free from closing myself in myself" (Chalier, 2020, p. 173). This displacement of the self is particularly extreme in the theological accounts of gratitude,[15] but, as we deployed in the Traditional Notion of Gratitude section, it also works this way in human gratitude—one appreciates, acknowledges, and values the *other*.

In the neoliberal account of gratitude, by contrast, the other disappears. The focus is on one's own self. Let us see this point in more detail, because it is a bit tricky. Apparently, the grateful individual—whether in neoliberalism or in other contexts—acknowledges the good impact that

[14] This neoliberal drift of education has been heavily contested not only because it is based in the questionable belief that the self can be "self-managed," but also that this can be taught and must be taught in order to turn students into "economically viable commodit[ies]" (Lewis, 2013, p. xii).

[15] Among Christian and Jewish theologians, the very idea of a self that belongs to the individual is questioned since God gives human beings a self as a gift through which they belong to him, and, therefore, our self is not exactly ours but his. For them, gratitude toward God does not have to be motivated by self-love but rather by love to God (McCabe, 2003; McGill, 2013; Dunnington, 2022: 4; Edwards, 2001).

the other has on him. It acknowledges, then, interdependence, as explained in the Ethical and Epistemic Advantages of Gratitude section. The grateful individual, then, is antinarcissistic.[16] Therefore, the grateful self seems incompatible with the neoliberal self, whom we have described as so autonomous and sovereign of himself that he denies—or, in a softer version, neglects—interdependence. Indeed, the awareness of the incompatibility between the practice of acknowledging the other's gift and liberalism dates back at least to Mauss's work from the 1950s.[17]

So, within neoliberalism, how can an individual be grateful? In my view, the reason that the neoliberal individual is encouraged to be grateful is not because he appreciates interdependence, but because he values the well-being that he knows feeling grateful will bring about *to him*. This view rests upon a view on the self clearly different from the one put forward by the western tradition on gratitude. Within neoliberalism, my self has an intrinsic worth and deserves the best. Self-interest is its engine (Beattie et al., 2019, p. 25).

Again, Robbins's website is a clear example of this phenomenon. Robbins focuses on the positive impact that feeling grateful might have on one's life, not on the life of the benefactors. But the practice of gratitude, as it was traditionally conceived within the western philosophical tradition, was mainly articulated around praising the benefactor and around the eagerness to benefit the benefactor. We can benefit them in several different ways, of course. But expressing gratefulness for what they have done for us is already a way of benefiting them, because when they are thanked for, they feel a number of nice things: They feel they are helpful, they feel their effort was worthwhile and is being acknowledged, they feel we are being nice to them. In other words, as I see it, it would make perfect sense to promote gratitude interventions to make the *other*—the benefactor—feel happier. This would not disqualify the benefits gratitude has for one's self. But nothing of this is mentioned by Robbins. And so the point is clear: Robbins is interested in gratitude as long as it benefits you, not others. You do not have to reciprocate. And if you have to express gratefulness, it is just because it is going to benefit you. In this sense, Robbins is a paradigmatic example of how positive psychology is "contributing to an ideological climate in which persons are not obliged to consider, let alone take responsibility for, the welfare of others" (Sugarman, 2015, p. 103). It is a neoliberal phenomenon insofar as "[a]cts of love, friendship, benevolence, and generosity are valued to the extent they increase individuals' social capital" (Sugarman, 2015, p. 111).

This represents part of a large push in positive psychology to be good to others because this will have positive effects on oneself. The notion of karma is being constantly invocated by self-help literature and social media because of this. Originally central to Hinduism, the western version of the notion considers it a sort of cosmic law according to which you receive in life the result of your own actions. Within this frame, behaving morally is encouraged for your self-interest. The same logic lies explicitly behind Robbins's encouragement to be grateful to others. He exemplifies it with a man who expressed his gratefulness to his benefactor and then, suddenly and surprisingly, was very lucky. Robbins's reading of the facts is that "the universe responded in kind." Kantians would argue that this is an instrumentalization of the other and it would be difficult to disagree with them.

In short, in the neoliberal promotion of happiness, others are seen "as resources for manipulation and optimization" (Binkley, 2017, p. 46). The same seems to apply to the neoliberal promotion of gratitude. Robbins's view is, then, an example of the fact that, within neoliberalism, "[u]tilitarian thinking takes on the main role" (Teo, 2018, p. 588).

What really does the neoliberal individual thank the benefactor for? We have seen in the Traditional Notion of Gratitude section that, according to the western notion of gratitude, the object of gratitude can be either the benefit itself or the intentionality of the benefactor or the intrinsic excellence of the benefactor. None of this applies to this new account of gratitude

[16] In this vein, psychologists have described ungrateful people as having a number of traits proper to the narcissistic personality that, as such, are focused on themselves—self-importance, arrogance, vanity, greed for admiration, and entitlement (Kernberg, 1975: McCullough et al., 2001, p. 260). Narcissists, just as the neoliberal self, believe they are self-sufficient.

[17] When Mauss writes on the need to acknowledge the donor and to reciprocate typical of exchange practices of some "archaic" societies, he is doing so in a gesture that opposes English liberal thought, for which the human being is independent rather than social. Douglas explains it lucidly in her foreword to Mauss's work (1990/1950).

promoted, among others, by Robbins. Within it, what the beneficiary really thanks the benefactor for is, ultimately, for *granting him the possibility to feel happier*.

But there is more to that. The differences between this new account of gratitude and the traditional account of gratitude developed in the Traditional Notion of Gratitude section do not only revolve around a certain notion of the self. The current emphasis on gratitude is also distinct in that it does not meet several of the nine traditional conditions of possibility of gratitude developed in the Traditional Notion of Gratitude section. For example, whether the benefactor *sacrificed* something, whether the benefactor really had *good intentions*, or whether the beneficiary *wishes to see the benefactor fare well* does not matter. The exhortation of gratefulness by Robbins seems to be telling the individual "do not be too picky and use *any* occasion to feel grateful."

Conclusion

The line of argument of the present article has been as follows. First, I have revised the western tradition on gratitude (the Traditional Notion of Gratitude section) in order to identify the nine conditions of possibility that, according to it, gratitude has to meet for it to be gratitude. We have seen that, among these conditions of possibility, the other plays a fundamental role, that is, the beneficiary feels grateful because of the benefactor's intentionality, he wishes to benefit the benefactor in return, he wishes him to fare well.

Second, the advantages of the practice of gratitude have been identified and described (the Ethical and Epistemic Advantages of Gratitude section). We have seen how the western tradition on gratitude has mainly highlighted moral and epistemic advantages. And I have noted that, since the beginning of the 2000s, positive psychology has worked hard to argue that feeling grateful also has a wide range of advantages at the psychological level—and even for one's general health (the Recent Interest in Gratitude by Positive Psychology section).

I have then posed the following question, which constitutes the raison d'être of the present article: Do these psychological benefits simply add to the moral and epistemic benefits already pointed out by the western tradition? Or, in this new push in the study of gratefulness, is there rather at stake an understanding of gratitude that is mutually exclusive with the traditional one? The analysis of Robbins's understanding of gratitude has allowed me to conclude that what there is at stake is something radically new—a neoliberal notion of gratitude in which the other plays no role (the Neoliberalism and Gratitude section).

As I hope to have demonstrated, in Robbins's account of gratitude, gratefulness is not expressed altruistically but for one's self-interest as an investment in one's well-being. This is clearly distinct from the traditional account of gratitude. Let me resume the main argument. Throughout this article, it has been claimed that, according to most theorists, for the *experience* of gratitude to arise, the benefit given has to be altruistic. But, for the expression of gratefulness to be genuine, the *expression* of gratitude also needs to be altruistic. That is, the benefactor is thanked to make *the benefactor* happy, to make him feel how much we appreciate his gesture. *Is it still gratitude when the reason why I express my gratefulness is my own interest, as happens in Robbins's account of gratitude*? Within theological accounts of gratitude, this issue is often debated. Is it still (altruistic) gratitude toward God if individuals thank him in the hope that one day, at the end of times, they will be rewarded by him? Is God thanked so that, sooner or later, he reciprocates? In secular accounts of gratitude, the question is also important: *Is it still gratitude when the reason why I express my gratefulness is my own interest, as Robbins encourages us all to do? Or, when self-interest enters the equation, does it rather cease to be gratitude?*

I do not dare to say that this is a perversion of gratitude—although, for some, it must certainly be. The conclusion that I would rather like to draw from the analysis of Robbins's account of gratitude is that it is a radically new product of the neoliberal era. In the West, the moral and epistemic benefits of gratitude *for us all* had been highlighted for at least more than two millennia, as has been explained in the Ethical and Epistemic Advantages of Gratitude section. What is new is the encouragement to feel gratefulness and express it *for one's own benefit*. The neoliberal encouragement of gratitude, then, stems from self-love and from an instrumental view of the other, which might legitimately lead the reader to wonder whether these practices encouraged by positive psychology "are contributing to

sustaining and creating some of the dissatisfaction which they promise a way out of" (Cabanas, 2018, p. 12). This instrumental view of the other was clearly absent from previous accounts of gratitude, described in the Traditional Notion of Gratitude section.

It is not my role now to judge whether this new account of gratitude is good or bad news. But what I think the analysis allows us to conclude is that it is very unlikely that the reflections on gratitude by positive psychology that circulate in self-books and social media would have taken this path if they were not interwoven with neoliberalism in the ways I have attempted to show in the Neoliberalism and Gratitude section, on neoliberalism and gratitude.

However, despite this radical newness, I would like to point out that this new account of gratitude can be placed within a certain genealogy of gratitude. As we have seen above, Leithart (2014) held that the history of western gratitude originates in the clash of two regimes of gratitude. For the first, typical of Antiquity, exchange and gratitude were interwoven: One gives in order to gain something. For the second, by contrast, if one expects something in return, there is no longer room for gratitude precisely, because it is a matter of a logic of exchange.

In a way, then, it could be stated that the account of gratitude that circulates in self-help books and social media such as Robbins's falls within the first group: The engine of gratefulness—this time, not of giving something but of expressing gratefulness—is that one might gain something. Within neoliberalism, the logic of self-interest gets in through the back door with the practice of gratitude. Robbins's view of gratefulness confronts us, then, with two issues that deserve further research. On the one hand, it leads us to the question of whether positive psychologists, and ordinary citizens in general, are "innocent"—or "unaware," to make it softer—of the ideology they embrace—it has been argued that believing that "ordinary citizens are woefully ignorant about it" is actually wrong (Azevedo et al., 2019, p. 51). On the other hand, the extent to which the practice of gratitude is interwoven with neoliberalism confronts us with the question of whether positive psychology in general, and gratitude studies in particular, might be "decolonized" from neoliberalism, as some have suggested à propos psychology (Adams et al., 2019, pp. 207–208).

At this stage, I must insist on this point: The seminal studies in the psychology of gratitude that stimulated this account of gratitude did not neglect otherness as we have described nor did they promote a self-informed by a neoliberal logic. Cullough's insistence on the moral and prosocial dimension of gratitude were a clear example of this (McCullough et al., 2001; McCullough et al., 2002). This new account of gratitude is inspired by them but only partially.

References

Adams, G., Estrada-Villalta, S., Sullivan, D., & Markus, H. R. (2019). The psychology of neoliberalism and the neoliberalism of psychology. *Journal of Social Issues*, *75*(1), 189–216. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12305

Algoe, S. B., Gable, S. L., & Maisel, N. C. (2008). It's the little things: Everyday gratitude as a booster shot for romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, *15*(4), 503–514. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2010.01273.x

Anderson, M. L. (2022). Giving thanks for the gift of life: Karl Barth on gratitude to God for one's own life. *Religions*, *13*(10), Article 959. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100959

Aquinas, T. (1920). *Summa theologiae*. Burns, Oates & Washbourne.

Aquinas, T. (2020). *Commentary on Ephesians*. Aquinas Institute.

Arrien, A. (2011). *Living in gratitude: A journey that will change your life*. Sounds True.

Aymerich, M. (2025, August 3). Ser agraïda allarga la vida [Being grateful throughout life]. *Diari Ara*. https://www.ara.cat/opinio/agraida-allarga-vida_129_5105616.html

Azevedo, F., Jost, J. T., & Sterling, J. (2019). Neoliberal ideology and the justification of inequality in capitalist societies: Why social and economic dimensions of ideology are intertwined. *Journal of Social Issues*, *75*(1), 49–88. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12310

Barth, K. (2010). *Church dogmatics* (G. W. Bromiley & T. F. Torrance, Eds.), (2a ed.). Hendrickson Publishers.

Beattie, P., Bettache, K., & Ching Yee Chong, K. (2019). Who is the neoliberal? Exploring neoliberal beliefs across East and West. *Journal of Social Issues*, *75*(1), 20–48. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12309

Berger, F. R. (1975). Gratitude. *Ethics*, *85*(4), 298–309. https://doi.org/10.1086/291969

Binkley, S. (2017). Happiness as resource and resilience: An emotion for neoliberal times. In A. J. Pykett, R. Jones, & M. Whithead (Eds.), *Psychological governance and public policy: Governing the mind, brain and behaviour* (pp. 37–56). Routledge.

Bonhoeffer, D. (2006). *Conspiracy and imprisonment, 1940–1945* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 16). Fortress Press.

Bono, G., Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2004). Gratitude in practice and the practice of gratitude. In A. P. A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp. 464–481). Wiley.

Bourdieu, P. (1998, December). The essence of neoliberalism. *Monde Diplomatique*. https://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu

Byung-Chul, H. (2015). *The burnout society*. Stanford University Press. (Original work published 2010)

Cabanas, E. (2018). Positive psychology and the legitimation of individualism. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*, *28*(1), 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354317747988

Caputo, J. D., & Scanlon, M. J. (1999). *God, the gift and postmodernism*. Indiana University Press.

Centeno, M. A., & Cohen, J. N. (2012). The arc of neoliberalism. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *38*, 317–340. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150235

Chalier, C. (2020). *Découvrir la gratitude au risque de l'asymetrie* [Discovering gratitude at the risk of asymmetry]. Bayard.

Chen, Y., Okereke, O. I., Kim, E. S., Tiemeier, H., Kubzansky, L. D., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2024). Gratitude and mortality among older U.S. female nurses. *JAMA Psychiatry*, *81*(10), 1030–1038. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2024.1687

Chisholm-Burns, M., & Formica, R. N. (2024). The gratitude paradox. *The Journal of Internal Medicine*, *295*(6), 712–714. https://doi.org/10.1111/joim.13788

Cicero. (2023). *De officiis. A critical guide* (R. Woolf, Ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Clark, M. S., & Mills, J. (1979). Interpersonal attraction in exchange and communal relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *37*(1), 12–24. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.37.1.12

Crary, J. (2014). *24/7: Late capitalism and the ends of sleep*. Verso.

Derrida, J. (1992). *Given time*. University of Chicago Press.

Dickens, L. R. (2017). Using gratitude to promote positive change: A series of meta-analyses investigating the effectiveness of gratitude interventions. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, *39*(4), 193–208. https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2017.1323638

Ding, K., & Liu, J. (2022). Comparing gratitude and pride: Evidence from brain and behavior. *Cognitive, Affective & Behavioral Neuroscience*, *22*, 1199–1214. https://doi.org/10.3758/s13415-022-01006-y

Dunnington, K. (2022). The distinctiveness of Christian gratitude: A theological survey. *Religions*, *13*(10), Article 889. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100889

Edwards, J. (2001). *The religious affections*. Banner of Truth.

Ehrenreich, B. (2010). *Smile or die: How positive thinking fooled America and the world*. Granta Books.

Emmons, R. A., & Crumpler, C. A. (2000). Gratitude as human strength: Appraising the evidence. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, *19*(1), 56–69. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2000.19.1.56

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. A. (Eds.). (2004). *The psychology of gratitude*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195150100.001.0001

Foucault, M. (1988). Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault. In A. L. Martin, H. Gutman, & P. Hutton (Eds.), *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault* (pp. 16–49). University of Massachusetts Press.

Ganti, T. (2014). Neoliberalism. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *43*, 89–104. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155528

Greenberg, M. S. (1980). A theory of indebtedness. In A. K. J. Gergen, M. S. Greenberg, & R. H. Wills (Eds.), *Social exchange: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 3–26). Plenum. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-3087-5_1

Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1037/10628-000

Hildebrand, D. von. (2000). *La gratitud* [Gratitude]. Ediciones Encuentro.

Holmes, K. (2014). *Gratitude: It's like glitter for your soul!* CreateSpace.

Honegger, H. (1925). *Volkswirtschaftliche gedankenströmungen, systeme und theorien der gegenwart, besonders im Deutschland* [Economic schools of thought, systems, and theories of the present, especially in Germany]. G. Braun.

Igarashi, A., & Ono, Y. (2022). Neoliberal ideology and negative attitudes towards immigrants: Evidence from a survey and survey experiment in Japan. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *52*(12), 1146–1157. https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12916

Kaczor, C. (2022). Thomas Aquinas on gratitude to God. *Religions*, *13*(8), Article 692. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13080692

Kant, I. (1963). *Lectures on ethics* (L. W. Beck, Ed.). Harper & Row.

Karns, C. M., Moore, W. E., III, & Mayr, U. (2017). The cultivation of pure altruism via gratitude: A functional MRI study of change with gratitude practice. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, *11*, Article 599. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2017.00599

Kashdan, T. B., Uswatte, G., & Julian, T. (2006). Gratitude and hedonic and eudaimonic well-being in Vietnam war veterans. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, *44*(2), 177–199. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2005.01.005

Kendler, K. S., Liu, X. Q., Gardner, C. O., McCullough, M. E., Larson, D., & Prescott, C. A. (2003). Dimensions of religiosity and their relationship to lifetime psychiatric and substance use disorders.

American Journal of Psychiatry, *160*(3), 496–503. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.160.3.496

Kernberg, O. (1975). *Borderline conditions and pathological narcissism*. Jason Aronson.

Keyes, C. M., & Haidt, J. (2003). *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived*. American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/10594-000

Kierkegaard, S. (2009). *Concluding unscientific postscript* (A. Hannay, Ed. & Trans.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511626760

King, L. A. (2001). The health benefits of writing about life goals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *27*(7), 798–807. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167201277003

Klein, M. (2001). *Envy and gratitude: A study of unconscious sources*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315014081

Lalgudi, S. (2020). *Gratitude journal: Invest few minutes a day to develop thankfulness, mindfulness and positivity*. Hippidoo.

Larner, W. (2009). Neo-liberalism: Policy, ideology, governmentality. *Studies in Political Economy*, *83*(1), 5–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/19187033.2000.11675231

Leithart, P. (2014). *Gratitude. An intellectual history*. Baylor University Press. https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.3_12152

Lewis, T. E. (2013). *On study: Giorgio Agamben and educational potentiality*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203069622

Locke, J. (n.d.). (1689). *Second treatise on government*. Hackett Publishing.

Manela, T. (2022). "Can you be grateful to a benefactor whose existence you doubt?." *Religions*, *13*(12), Article 1155. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13121155

Mauss, M. (1990). *The gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*. (M. Douglas, Pròleg). Routledge.

McCabe, H. (2003). *God, Christ, and us*. Continuum.

McConnell, T. (1993). *Gratitude*. Chicago University Press.

McCullough, M. E., Kilpatrick, S., Emmons, R. A., & Larson, D. B. (2001). Is gratitude a moral affect? *Psychological Bulletin*, *127*(2), 249–266. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.127.2.249

McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *82*(1), 112–127. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.1.112

McGill, A. (2013). *Dying unto life*. Cascade Books.

Mudge, S. L. (2008). *Neoliberalism's three faces*. (EUI Working Paper MWP No. 2008/34). European University Institute. https://hdl.handle.net/1814/9108

Ortner, S. (2011). On neoliberalism. *Anthropology of This Century*, *1*, 1–31. https://hdl.handle.net/1814/9108

Ortony, A., Clore, G. L., & Collins, A. (1988). *The cognitive structure of emotions*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511571299

Pitts-Taylor, V. (2010). The plastic brain: Neoliberalism and the neuronal self. *Health*, *14*(6), 635–652. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459309360796

Pykett, J., Jones, R., & Whithead, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Psychological governance and public policy. Governing the mind, brain and behaviour*. Routledge.

Robbins, T. (1991). *Awaken the giant within*. Free Press.

Robbins, T. (2025a, March 25). *The gifts of life/gratitude*. https://www.tonyrobbins.com/es/the-gifts-of-life/gratitude

Robbins, T. (2025b, March 25). *Practice of gratitude*. https://www.tonyrobbins.com/es/blog/practice-of-gratitude

Robbins, T. (2025c, March 25). *How to practice gratitude*. https://www.tonyrobbins.com/es/business/how-to-practice-gratitude

Robbins, T., & McClendon, J. (1997). *Unlimited power*. Simon & Schuster.

Rushdy's, A. (2020). *Philosophies of gratitude*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197526866.001.0001

Sauber, T. (2025, April 23). What is gratitude and why is it so important? *Positive Psychology*. https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-appreciation/#why-is-it-important-to-be-grateful

Saxe, R., & Kanwisher, N. (2003). People thinking about thinking people: The role of the temporo-parietal junction in "theory of mind." *NeuroImage*, *19*(4), 1835–1842. https://doi.org/10.1016/s1053-8119(03)00230-1

Seligman, M. (2006). *Learned optimism*. Pocket Books.

Seneca. (2011). *On benefits*. (M. Griffin & B. Inwood, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

Sheldon, K. M., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2006). How to increase and sustain positive emotion: The effects of expressing gratitude and visualizing best possible selves. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *1*(2), 73–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760500510676

Simmel, G. (1950). Faithfulness and gratitude. In A. K. H. Wolff (Ed.), *The sociology of Georg Simmel* (pp. 379–426). Free Press.

Smith, A. (1976). *The theory of moral sentiments* (6a ed.). Clarendon Press. (Original work published 1790)

Steger, M. B., & Roy, R. K. (2010). *Neoliberalism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199560516.001.0001

Sugarman, J. (2015). Neoliberalism and psychological ethics. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical*

Psychology, *35*(2), 103–116. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038960

Teo, T. (2018). Homo neoliberalus: From personality to forms of subjectivity. *Theory & Psychology*, *28*(5), 581–599. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354318794899

Tesser, A., Gatewood, R., & Driver, M. (1968). Some determinants of gratitude. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *9*(2), 233–236. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0025905

Valls Boix, J. E. (2022). *Metafísica de la pereza*. Ned Ediciones.

Walker, A. D. M. (1980–1981). Gratefulness and gratitude. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series*, *81*(1), 39–55. https://doi.org/10.1093/aristotelian/81.1.39

Watkins, P. C., Scheer, J., Ovnicek, M., & Kolts, R. (2006). The debt of gratitude: Dissociating gratitude and indebtedness. *Cognition and Emotion*, *20*(2), 217–241. https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930500172291

Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review*, *92*(4), 548–573. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.92.4.548

Williamson, J. (2003). Overview: An agenda for restarting growth and reform. In A. P. P. Kuczynski & J. Williamson (Eds.), *After the Washington consensus: Restarting growth and reform in Latin America* (pp. 1–20). Institute for International Economics.

Wood, A. M., Froh, J. J., & Geraghty, A. W. A. (2010). Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *30*(7), 890–905. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2010.03.005

Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Gillett, R., Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2008). The role of gratitude in the development of social support, stress, and depression: Two longitudinal studies. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *42*(4), 854–871. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2007.11.003

Received May 8, 2025
Revision received December 10, 2025
Accepted December 29, 2025 ■