

Wood, A. M. (in press). Gratitude. In A. Michalos [ed.] *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life Research*. New York: Springer.

Definition:

Gratitude is cognitive and emotional reaction arising from noticing and appreciating the benefits that one has received. The sources of the perceived benefits that lead to gratitude are diverse and include (a) direct help, (b) tangible possessions, (c) positive relationships, (d) the positive in a given moment, and (e) doing well compared to others (Wood, Maltby, Stewart, & Joseph, 2008). This implies that gratitude arises from both direct aid from a specific other and more general appreciation of the positive aspects in one's life. Gratitude can be considered both as a state, defined as a reaction at a given single time point, or as a personality [[link to entry](#)] trait, defined according to individual differences in how frequently and intensely a person feels the state of gratitude. In recent years gratitude has emerged as a key clinically relevant personality trait due to a strong link with well-being (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010).

Description:

Throughout history gratitude has been given considerable attention in philosophical and theological accounts of human functioning (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000), being a focus of all major religious practices, and considered by the economist and philosopher Adam Smith as essential to the running of society through motivating the reciprocation of aid when there are no other legal or monetary incentives to do so (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). Within psychology, the systematic study of gratitude only began in earnest in after 2000, being one of many understudied traits highlighted by the positive psychology movement [[link to entry](#)] (Wood & Tarrrier, 2010). In recent years, state gratitude has been shown to operate much as Adam Smith suggested, and trait gratitude has been shown to be predict well-being strongly, uniquely, and causally (Wood et al., 2010).

State gratitude appears to have three functions (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). First, gratitude acts as a "moral barometer" occurring after aid is received (Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley, & Joseph, 2008). Second, gratitude acts as a "moral motivator", encouraging the repayment of aid (Tsang, 2006). Third, gratitude acts as a "moral reinforcer", motivating people who have been thanked to give more aid in the future (Rind & Bordia, 1995). Taken together, the research suggests that gratitude has an important function in regulating fairness behaviours associated with giving and receiving with help, suggesting a possible evolutionary function of the emotion.

Trait gratitude is linked to interpersonal state gratitude through specific information processing biases. State gratitude occurs in response to aid that is interpreted to be costly (to the benefactor), valuable (to the receiver), and intended altruistically (rather than ulteriorly motivated). People who experience a lot of gratitude in life feel more gratitude in a given situation as they habitually interpret the help they receive as more costly, more valuable, and more altruistically intended (Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley et al., 2008). Whilst a reaction to interpersonal help is only one form of state gratitude, and other mechanisms may link trait gratitude to other aspects such as appreciation of the present moment, the basic finding that

grateful people have positive information processing biases is consistent with wider work suggesting the strong link between trait gratitude and well-being.

Trait gratitude correlates with a large array of well-being indicators (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). Whilst many personality traits predict well-being, gratitude is unique in that it predicts substantial variance in both life satisfaction (Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2008) and psychological well-being (Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2009) above the 50 facets of the Five Factor Model [[link to entry](#)], suggesting that the relationships cannot be explained by the influence of other commonly studied personality traits. The relationship between gratitude and well-being also appears to be causal, with higher levels of gratitude leading to less depression, less stress, and more social support [[link to entry](#)] during a life transition (Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008). Finally, gratitude is related to other aspects of life known to be important to well-being including positive coping (Wood, Joseph, & Linley, 2007) and good quality of sleep (Wood, Joseph, Lloyd, & Atkins, 2009). Given the strong link between gratitude and well-being there has been much interest in increasing gratitude therapeutically in order to decrease clinical levels of distress (Emmons, 2007). There are several techniques (Wood et al., 2010), the most common of which is maintaining “gratitude diaries” where people list 3 things for which they are grateful on a daily basis (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). This technique appears to encourage people to focus on the benefits they have throughout each day. The technique is highly effective, working as well as some of the most common clinical techniques in reducing stress (Geraghty, Wood, & Hyland, 2010b) and body image problems (Geraghty, Wood, & Hyland, 2010a) whilst being more likely to avoid people dropping out of treatment.

References:

Note: Many of the references are freely available at www.alexwoodpsychology.com and <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/labs/emmons/PWT/index.cfm>.

- Emmons, R. A. (2007). *Thanks! How the new science of gratitude can make you happier*: New York: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Emmons, R. A., & Crumpler, C. A. (2000). Gratitude as a human strength: Appraising the evidence. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 19*, 56-69.
- Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 377-389.
- Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2004). *The psychology of gratitude*: New York: Oxford University Press.
- Geraghty, A. W. A., Wood, A. M., & Hyland, M. E. (2010a). Attrition from self-directed interventions: Investigating the relationship between psychological predictors, interventional content and dropout from a body image intervention. *Social Science & Medicine, 71*, 31-37.
- Geraghty, A. W. A., Wood, A. M., & Hyland, M. E. (2010b). Dissociating the facets of hope: Agency and pathways predict attrition from unguided self-help in opposite directions. *Journal of Research in Personality, 44*, 155-158.
- McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J. A. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 112-127.
- McCullough, M. E., Kilpatrick, S. D., Emmons, R. A., & Larson, D. B. (2001). Is gratitude a moral affect? *Psychological Bulletin, 127*, 249-266.

- Rind, B., & Bordia, P. (1995). Effect of servers thank-you and personalization on restaurant tipping. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 25*, 745-751.
- Tsang, J.-A. (2006). Gratitude and prosocial behaviour: An experimental test of gratitude. *Cognition & Emotion, 20*, 138-148.
- Wood, A. M., Froh, J. J., & Geraghty, A. W. A. (2010). Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration. *Clinical Psychology Review, 30*, 890-905.
- Wood, A. M., Joseph, S., & Linley, P. A. (2007). Coping style as a psychological resource of grateful people. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 26*, 1108 - 1125.
- Wood, A. M., Joseph, S., Lloyd, J., & Atkins, S. (2009). Gratitude influences sleep through the mechanism of pre-sleep cognitions. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 66*, 43-48.
- Wood, A. M., Joseph, S., & Maltby, J. (2008). Gratitude uniquely predicts satisfaction with life: Incremental validity above the domains and facets of the five factor model. *Personality and Individual Differences, 45*, 49-54.
- Wood, A. M., Joseph, S., & Maltby, J. (2009). Gratitude predicts psychological well-being above the big five facets. *Personality and Individual Differences, 46*, 443-447.
- 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*, 854-871.
- Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Stewart, N., & Joseph, S. (2008). Conceptualizing gratitude and appreciation as a unitary personality trait. *Personality and Individual Differences, 44*, 619-630.
- Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Stewart, N., Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2008). A social-cognitive model of trait and state levels of gratitude. *Emotion, 8*, 281-290.
- Wood, A. M., & Tarrier, N. (2010). Positive clinical psychology: A new vision and strategy for integrated research and practice. *Clinical Psychology Review, 30*, 819-829.