


## Chapter 10

# The Phenomenological Claims of Gratitude as a Religious Experience and Its Moral Worth: Expression and Applicability

Essien D. Essien

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7140-7399>  
University of Uyo, Nigeria

### ABSTRACT

*Contemporary thinking regarding the phenomenon of gratitude portrays it as a fundamental attribute of every human being as well as a commendable and beneficial human quality capable of enhancing human flourishing in society. This study demonstrates that although a variety of life experiences can elicit feelings of gratitude, there is evidence that the moral human society considers gratitude as a force capable of encouraging acts of beneficence. Apparently though, in the lens of ethics, gratitude is a purely person-to-person phenomenon, while ingratitude is seen as a profound moral failure. This research addresses issues of why moralists generally see gratitude as an obligation and stressed its dutiful aspects rather than its emotional quality. Findings show that until the advent of moral sentimentalism, gratitude interventions had always produced positive outcomes and benefits which in the heart of ethics is a duty and social obligation towards human benefactors and God.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-4595-9.ch010

## **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout most of human history and transversely nearly all cultures, gratitude is conceptualized as both a moral attribute as well as a normative aspect of the human personality and social life (Hlava & Elfers, 2016). This lends credence to why it is highly prized in nearly all the religions of the world such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism to mention just but a few. Even though gratitude is experienced and expressed differently around the world, people in many societies appear to diversely experience this phenomenon and have developed distinct linguistic and cultural apparatus towards expressing it. Empirical evidence has shown that gratitude since antiquity has played an important role in the development of moral thought (Kirmani, 2015). Ambivalently examined, gratitude is viewed both as a response to moral behaviour and a motivator of moral behaviour. That explains why for centuries, ethicists and philosophers, theologians, popular writers and lately psychologists have grappled with understanding the nature of gratitude as well as understanding how it informs how we ought to treat others. Traditionally though, gratitude has been explored by scholars as a moral and religious value, as well as a moral and spiritual emotion. Specifically in ethics, the plausibility and moral usefulness of the notion of gratitude has been depicted and promoted as an altruistic, morally good and beneficial concept to oneself and others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). It is also viewed as being capable to prompts individuals toward prosocial behaviours and virtue of humility. This however lends credence to the fact that being grateful for what you have is ethically conceived as virtuous, while acts expressing gratefulness to those who have benefited you is often regarded as morally praiseworthy, if not morally expected (Prinz, 2009). Nonetheless, a critical interrogation of the moral status of gratitude reveals that gratitude interventions have beneficial functions for improving myriad positive outcomes, and the cultivation of moral education.

All the way through the Ancient and Medieval times, and until modern days, scholars have made effort to defined gratitude as an integral and important part of social exchange, especially one that helps in harmonizing social relationships and encouraging benevolence (Nelson, 2009). Though most people have an instinctive understanding of what gratitude is, but the concept has proven to be surprisingly difficult to define. While some see it as an emotion, others considered it to be a virtue and/or behaviour. Indeed, gratitude can mean different things to different people in different contexts. This perhaps explains why researchers have developed some frameworks for conceptualizing gratitude such that it can be studied scientifically. In this regard, Plato was among the earliest philosophers to leave record of the accounts of gratitude. His primary focus was on understanding the gratitude one owes to his or her city. The focus in the literature, however, quickly shifted from thinking

27 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: [www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-phenomenological-claims-of-gratitude-as-a-religious-experience-and-its-moral-worth/270036](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-phenomenological-claims-of-gratitude-as-a-religious-experience-and-its-moral-worth/270036)

## Related Content

---

Exploring Bilingual Dynamics: Students' Perspectives in Islamic Studies Classrooms Across English and Arabic Medium International Schools  
Syeda Rabia Tahir (2024). *International Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies* (pp. 1-12).

[www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-bilingual-dynamics/360654](http://www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-bilingual-dynamics/360654)

Exploring Bilingual Dynamics: Students' Perspectives in Islamic Studies Classrooms Across English and Arabic Medium International Schools  
Syeda Rabia Tahir (2024). *International Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies* (pp. 1-12).

[www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-bilingual-dynamics/360654](http://www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-bilingual-dynamics/360654)

Exploring Bilingual Dynamics: Students' Perspectives in Islamic Studies Classrooms Across English and Arabic Medium International Schools  
Syeda Rabia Tahir (2024). *International Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies* (pp. 1-12).

[www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-bilingual-dynamics/360654](http://www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-bilingual-dynamics/360654)

Exploring Bilingual Dynamics: Students' Perspectives in Islamic Studies Classrooms Across English and Arabic Medium International Schools  
Syeda Rabia Tahir (2024). *International Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies* (pp. 1-12).

[www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-bilingual-dynamics/360654](http://www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-bilingual-dynamics/360654)

Exploring the Role of OpenStreetMap in Mapping Religious Tourism in Pakistan for Sustainable Development

Munir Ahmad (2023). *Experiences, Advantages, and Economic Dimensions of Pilgrimage Routes* (pp. 23-40).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/exploring-the-role-of-openstreetmap-in-mapping-religious-tourism-in-pakistan-for-sustainable-development/333809](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/exploring-the-role-of-openstreetmap-in-mapping-religious-tourism-in-pakistan-for-sustainable-development/333809)