The Moral Psychology of Gratitude

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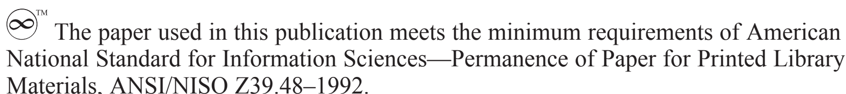

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Chapter 11

Gratitude, Authenticity, and Self-Authorship

Jack J. Bauer and Colin Shanahan

> *I was 26. I moved to [location]. I stayed with my cousin but she moved [away] after only three months. I ended up being completely alone for six months and it turned out to be the best six months of my life. I was able to go deep within myself and cater to my wants and needs. I became very grateful [and] learned to depend on me. I matured and blossomed into the woman that was within.*
>
> —Research participant, age forty-two, describing a "turning point in life"

> *It's the truth of who I am [. . .] all the peace and joy, and harmony and gratitude that I seek in my life is within me. It is who I am.*
>
> —Research participant, age forty-three, describing her "religious or spiritual beliefs"

These excerpts come from two studies of autobiographical life stories (Bauer & DesAutels, 2017; Bauer, Graham, Lauber, & Lynch, 2017) and illustrate how gratitude and authenticity can arise together in the developmental process of self-authorship. However, these brief passages hardly convey the range and depth of the phenomena at hand. In this chapter, we approach gratitude and authenticity as forms of meaning-making, as qualities of a good life, as characteristics of personality and self-identity, and as developing skills for thinking about the self and others.

As a form of meaning-making, the virtue of gratitude has at its root the ideal of cooperative human relationships. The grateful individual is routinely aware of and acknowledges others' beneficence, which in turn motivates others and oneself toward good works in the future. Gratitude helps make communal endeavors worthwhile and meaningful.

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As a form of meaning-making, the virtue of authenticity has at its root the ideal of freedom. The authentic individual acts and maps out a life according to an internal compass pointing to a magnetic north that is oneself, which in turn motivates the individual person to be more than just a cog in the social machine. Authenticity helps make agentic endeavors worthwhile and meaningful.

Living thankfully and authentically are hallmarks of a good life. Where gratitude and authenticity have been studied together, they correlate (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008). Yet gratitude and authenticity have received little joint attention in either theory or empirical research, perhaps because the two virtues seem to be so different. Gratitude is about giving thanks, whereas authenticity is about being true to oneself. Expressions of gratitude are readily recognizable (Emmons, 2004), whereas expressions of authenticity are subtler, made known only in light of one's interior life. Gratitude appears to be necessary for human reciprocity and social relations (and perhaps the survival of our species [Bonnie & de Waal, 2004]), whereas authenticity (at least in its existential sense) is a more refined virtue, hardly necessary for survival and reproduction. Gratitude, even as measured in various ways, routinely correlates with measures of subjective or psychological well-being (for a review, see Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010), whereas high levels of authenticity correlate with either high levels of well-being (Kernis, 2003) or low levels of well-being (Shimai, Otake, Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006), depending on how authenticity is measured. It might seem as though the only connection between gratitude and authenticity is that they appear as two virtues on a list of character strengths (e.g., Shimai et al., 2006).

However, gratitude and authenticity converge in a way that is central to the development of a good life, particularly when viewed through the lens of self-authorship. In authoring or narrating one's self-identity, the person values and positions the self and others relative to each other—a process that informs and is informed by the experiencing and expressing of both gratitude and authenticity. In this chapter, we examine how gratitude, authenticity, and self-authorship jointly facilitate the individual's developing capacity to understand the interdependent nature of both personal experience and a good life. The result is a mutually increasing capacity for *authentic gratitude* and *grateful authenticity*.

GRATITUDE

Gratitude is a complex phenomenon and has been approached as a situation-based emotion (e.g., DeSteno, Bartlett, Baumann, Williams, & Dickens, 2010; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001), a motivation (e.g., Froh,

Bono, & Emmons, 2010), a moral barometer (McCullough & Tsang, 2004), a cause of well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), a facilitator of relationships (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008; Algoe, Frederickson, & Gable, 2013), a duty or rule that cultures universally encourage their members to express (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000), and a spiritual or transcendent experience (e.g., McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2004). These features play important roles in the present chapter, but all through the lens of the development of gratitude as a virtuous personality characteristic—that is, as a feature of a good life.

For gratitude to serve as a feature of a good life, gratitude must be expressed and experienced routinely in a person's life—a characteristic of one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (McCullough et al., 2004). McCullough and Tsang (2004) review support for Cicero's claim that gratitude is the "parent of the virtues." We take this position, arguing from a developmental perspective that the *expression* of gratitude represents one of the earliest virtues we teach young children to exercise, from which later in childhood develops a more genuine (in other words, more authentic) *experience* of gratitude, with increasingly deeper experiences of gratitude as authenticity develops in one's narrative self-identity.

As a parent of other moral virtues, gratitude involves certain minimum requirements for thinking and acting virtuously. Gratitude is among the primary or basic motivators of moral behavior (McCullough & Tsang, 2004). Gratitude involves one of the more primitive features of conventional definitions of moral reasoning: attributing intentionality of the good to another person (McCullough et al., 2001). We are not specifically grateful to someone if we believe they *had* to help us (i.e., it was their duty) or if we believe their helping us was by accident or a byproduct (Roberts, 2004). Furthermore, the fact that we know others might be grateful serves as an additional motivation to do good.

Gratitude may well serve to facilitate social reciprocity, raising the question of gratitude's evolutionary function in humans and other primates (Bonnie & de Waal, 2004). Reciprocal social arrangements, in which one organism repays another organism for bestowing some good, is common in the animal world. However, gratitude is relatively uncommon among species, as it requires a mental capacity for making attributions of agency that further facilitate reciprocal behaviors. This ability for "calculated reciprocity" is largely restricted to humans, chimpanzees, and possibly other primates (Bonnie & de Waal, p. 220). However, the bar is high: merely "attitudinal reciprocity" (p. 220), or mirroring the other's attitude, is not enough to be considered gratitude. Bonnie and de Waal emphasize the cognitive complexity required for such reciprocal interactions to be called gratitude.

The concept of genuine gratitude or authentic gratitude can be defined by the capacity not only to express gratitude as a social script but also to

experience the emotion of gratitude (Froh, Miller, & Snyder, 2007). The difference here is between knowing when to say "thank you" and knowing why gratitude is appropriate, the latter of which facilitates feeling grateful. Such authentic gratitude seems to develop as a routine characteristic of personality sometime in later childhood (more on this later). Yet the authentic gratitude of the child is not the authentic gratitude of the adult, who has considerably heightened capacities for living authentically, the topic to which we turn next, before eventually considering how authentic gratitude (and grateful authenticity) develop as a function of an increasingly more humane and interdependent self-authorship.

AUTHENTICITY

Gratitude may require more cognitive complexity than almost any other species can muster, but compared to other human virtues, gratitude falls on the simpler side of the scale. Whereas gratitude lays a simple foundation for other moral virtues, authenticity functions as one of the more complex, developmentally advanced forms of virtue. Gratitude is a requirement of a good life; authenticity is an aspiration of it.

Or so it would seem to philosophers of ethics and virtue. But at least one model of authenticity in psychological science and in folk psychology claims that authenticity does not require a moral consideration of others' welfare.

Essentialist versus Existentialist Authenticity

Generally speaking, authenticity is being true to yourself. But is it better to be what you were born to be, rather than what you want to be? Or is it better to be what you want to be, rather than what you were born to be? The two questions presuppose two important definitions of authenticity that are often pitted against each other: essentialist authenticity and existentialist authenticity (Bauer, in press). We describe each of them further, but we first wish to emphasize that essentialism and existentialism are two philosophical positions that make both ontological and ethical claims about the source and functioning of the self and personhood. As forms of authenticity, essentialist and existentialist authenticity represent two models that are studied by researchers in psychology and that are held intuitively in folk psychology (although only recently have these models been framed as *essentialist* and *existentialist*; Bauer, in press).

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These two positions are not mutually exclusive but rather are contrasted by *developmental capacities*. The capacity to be authentic from an essentialist perspective develops prior to the capacity for existentialist authenticity.

The qualities of existentialist authenticity *include* some of the qualities of essentialist authenticity but are not bound to them. Existentialist authenticity is characterized by capacities that build on those of essentialist authenticity but in addition include capacities that develop later.

Essentialist authenticity. Essentialist authenticity means being *true to your traits*, especially the most deeply embedded of your traits—"what you were born to be" or "what you were brought up to be." The term "essentialist authenticity" refers to the belief that one's true self already exists in oneself—the core traits that, left to their own devices, would (and should) govern one's behavior (e.g., McGregor, McAdams, & Little, 2006). Not only that, but these core traits do not necessarily require much self-discovery or psychological unearthing; these traits may well be readily observed, like extraversion or even aggression. Essentialist authenticity asks the person to live out those core personality characteristics that are considered to be implanted or embedded within us—that is, shaped by nature (i.e., one's genetically predisposed traits), nurture (i.e., one's socially ingrained traits), or some supernatural force (e.g., one's god-given soul). Whereas the attempt to enact one's essence *may* involve intense efforts toward self-discovery, the goal of essentialist authenticity may also be simpler to conceptualize, such as the attempt to enact those traits that one believes to be factually and *inherently who we are*. To some degree, concern for others' welfare may be beside the point. Let's say Donald routinely disparages others. If Donald is a belligerent soul (i.e., belligerent in essence), then not only is he justified in disparaging others but he also *should* do so, because then he is being authentic: "It's just Donald being Donald."

Existentialist authenticity. Existentialist authenticity means being *true to our values*, or being "what you want to be." The term *existentialist authenticity* refers to the belief of existentialist philosophers that the person *constructs* a self-identity based on virtues that one chooses and that carry responsibilities for the welfare of others (Sartre, 1943). However, the "choosing" that we have in mind is not radically constructivist. It is constructivist to the degree that psychosocial development in practice will allow (Erikson, 1950; McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997): the narrative construction of a self-identity is rooted in certain biological and social affordances that limit choices as well as the person's capacity to conceptualize and enact those choices (Taylor, 1989). Thus, by *existentialist authenticity*, we mean a eudaimonic, existentialist authenticity (Bauer, in press). This constructing and choosing does not mean that the person can simply choose some particular virtue and that this choosing makes the person virtuous. Something of essentialism obtains: We in fact are born and bred to have particular characteristics, some of which are virtuous, which limits the degrees to which we can enact various virtues. Existentialist authenticity, then, is part self-discovery and

part self-creation (May, 1969). Of those particular virtues (and vices) that we discover "within" us and that we can cultivate like skills (Annas, 2011), we choose some and not others. To the degree that we—after critical examination of our ethical roles and responsibilities in a world of others—cultivate and enact virtues that we value or identify with, we live more authentically from an existentialist perspective.

These virtues are typically subtle and are not easily articulated, even if they might fall under categories like "wisdom" or "love." The person who enacts these authentic virtues routinely recognizes the formidable forces, both external and internal, that often seem to conspire against pursuing wisdom or love. Enacting existentialist authenticity, generally speaking, requires decades of development, self-examination, testing one's idealized virtues in real-life contexts, and modifying or reconstructing one's (narrative) self-identity in light of the outcomes and one's evolving ideals. This development over decades leads the individual to recognize not only how to enact one's own configurations of virtues and abilities but also how deeply and pervasively dependent one's life and self-identity are on other people. Such understandings and processes are critical to the developmental processes of Maslow's (1968) self-actualization, Rogers's (1961) fully functioning person, and Jung's (1959) individuation.

Essence of what? The notion that essentialist authenticity might not involve a concern for morality might sound strange, because eudaimonists (e.g., Flanagan, 2007; Haybron, 2008; Waterman, 2013) generally posit an ingrained essence that depends on ethical reasoning. However, essentialist authenticity focuses on the essence of one's *personality*, *not of ethics* or living a good life. For the person who believes in essentialist authenticity, authenticity is a matter of living according to one's core personality characteristics, which may or may not have anything to do with ethics. In contrast, existentialist authenticity focuses on the *ethical essence* of one's personality—those personality characteristics that facilitate the living of a morally *good* life. Whereas Sartrean existentialism emphasizes the radical primacy of choice and free will, existentialist perspectives can also include a position of choice within the limits of one's deeply embedded characteristics (given by genes or social environments), such that one's understanding of self and others is a matter of biologically, psychologically, and socially contextualized meaning-making (particularly in narrative forms—e.g., Guignon [2004] and Ricoeur [1985]).

The role of gratitude. Gratitude plays different roles in these two definitions of authenticity. Essentialist authenticity as a broad class of authenticity requires no gratitude at all. However, essentialism in virtue ethics more broadly is found in the eudaimonic tradition, which emphasizes the essence *of* the person and requires dependence-related virtues like gratitude, compassion, and generosity (Chappell, this volume; MacIntyre, 2001). Of course,

individuals who hold an essentialist view of authenticity may well feel and express gratitude to those they believe to have contributed to their formation. Individuals might be thankful to their parents, their god, or any number of other people or forces that created their inner essence. But gratitude is not necessary for essentialist beliefs in authenticity. Only enacting one's inner essence, whether morally virtuous or not, is necessary.

However, gratitude plays a critical role for existentialist authenticity, which is inherently moral. "Authenticity requires something more than making a decision to identify with something, where *what* we identify with is irrelevant" (Guignon, 2004, p. 155). "Instead, we need to see that our identity-conferring identifications are drawn from, and are answerable to, the shared historical commitments and ideals that make up our communal life-world." Existentialist authenticity involves an awareness of the causes, constitution, and effects of personhood as inherently embedded in a world of others. Such an awareness of oneself would seem to lead naturally to an appreciation for and gratitude toward other people and forces. We call this *existentially authentic gratitude*.

Self-Discovery: Essentialist or Existentialist Authenticity?

Existentialist authenticity in the eudaimonic tradition also involves a searching for or otherwise trying to discover and enact a true self that is buried deep within. This process of self-discovery might look like an essentialist belief (and to some degree it is), but three factors steer this process in the existential direction.

First, whereas essentialist authenticity may involve a process of self-discovery, self-discovery involves not merely acting in accord with the many characteristics that one discovers in the process of self-searching but also an acknowledgment of one's *choosing* from them—choices that rest on which personal characteristics one values and does not value. Existentialist authenticity does not ignore the fact that certain characteristics are deeply embedded by nature and nurture. Essentialist authenticity involves a belief that nature and nurture are all that matter for authenticity. As it turns out, individuals who strive to match their chosen personal values with their inborn traits were found to have especially high levels of psychological health and well-being (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). (However, we note that subjective well-being is not a requisite of existentialist authenticity.) In any case, for the existentialist, "Self-discovery requires *poēsis*, making" (Taylor, 1991, p.62). Recently we found that people who hold essentialist beliefs in authenticity value discovery but not creation metaphors of the "true self," whereas people who hold existentialist beliefs in authenticity value both discovery and creation metaphors of the "true self" (Shanahan & Bauer, 2018).

Second, whereas a belief in essentialist authenticity need not accept the idea that one's true self must have something to do with morality, ethics, or concern for others' welfare, a belief in existentialist authenticity claims that authenticity is inherently a moral concern. The active pursuit of self-discovery is ultimately about choosing to become more virtuous (i.e., to enact virtues more routinely). Recently, we found that people who hold existentialist beliefs in authenticity score higher on measures of identifying with ethical concerns—gratitude and generativity specifically, and morality in general—whereas people who hold essentialist beliefs in authenticity do not (Shanahan & Bauer, 2018).

Third, the sense of interdependence is central to existential authenticity. Consonant with an existentialist perspective on authenticity, Charles Taylor (1991, p. 41) writes, "Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it *supposes* such demands" (emphasis added). We add that, given the maturity of authenticity that we explain later, these demands are not viewed as exclusively burdensome but rather as a natural extension of human interdependence. It would seem that gratitude would logically and naturally follow from an awareness of such an interdependent reliance on others. However, gratitude is scarcely mentioned in either the philosophy or psychology of authenticity (e.g., Guignon, 2004; Sartre, 1943). Indeed, one of the three dimensions of a prominent self-report measure of authenticity (Wood et al., 2008) casts "accepting external influence" as *antithetical* to authenticity.[1] We note that the self-report items that measure "accepting external influence" are especially conformist in nature. In contrast, existential authenticity as a moral virtue requires a post-conformist capacity to think about the necessarily interdependent relation between self and others (see the developmental section next on the role of the conformist mindset in gratitude and authenticity)—and requires, it seems to us, an experience of gratitude.

As an example of this grateful kind of authenticity, Abraham Maslow (1968) notes that the self-actualizing person, whose central characteristics feature authenticity, experiences deep gratitude toward other people or a transcendent entity. Experiences of existential enlightenment (Maslow's "peak experiences" included), which are in many ways acute experiences of authenticity, are notable for profound experiences of gratitude (James, 1902). As a personality characteristic, existential authenticity involves a deep sense of gratitude, which we explain later, after first explaining how the development of self-authorship serves to bridge gratitude and authenticity.

SELF-AUTHORSHIP

Gratitude and authenticity are not merely virtuous characteristics that can be used to *describe* a person who routinely enacts those virtues. These are also

virtues with which some people *identify* and routinely *strive* to enact. For such people, gratitude or authenticity is a personally meaningful value. These people *believe in* the virtue of gratitude or authenticity. When people strive to live gratefully and authentically, these virtues become personally meaningful features of their self-identity.

People create a self-identity—that is, their personally meaningful understanding of themselves over time—in the stories they construct and tell about their lives (McAdams, 2008). In creating a *narrative self-identity*, the person attempts to make sense of the myriad aspects of her life (of oneself as a whole, particular characteristics of oneself, other individuals and groups as wholes and in particular events, specific actions, things, etc.). The idea that a life story is *an attempt* raises the question: What are people trying to do in constructing a life story, in making sense of themselves and their lives? In a nutshell, people are trying to create a good life—and they do so by trying to create a *good life story* (Bauer, 2016). For people who identify with the virtues of gratitude and authenticity, these virtues surface as themes in people's life stories—themes on which a good life story is based.

Cultural Master Narratives of Gratitude and Authenticity

Individuals are not left on their own to create a good life story, nor need they reinvent the wheel. Cultures provide individuals with models of virtues and even stories of virtues by which to live. Such stories are known as *cultural master narratives* (Hammack, 2011; McAdams, 2006). Cultural master narratives are stories that a culture treasures for the virtues those stories extol. These stories and virtues pervade a culture. They are found across forms of publishing and cultural discourse that are produced by social institutions. Cultural master narratives are found in literature, film, music, religion, politics, education, government, commerce, media, and advertising. Cultural master narratives present models for individuals on what a good life is—and on how to construct (and live out) a good life story (Bauer, 2016). Individuals borrow from cultural master narratives to interpret and plan their actual lives.

Enter gratitude and authenticity: individuals draw on cultural master narratives that feature the virtues of gratitude and authenticity. The stories and mythology of all major religions and cultures around the world emphasize the virtue of gratitude (e.g., Emmons, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Steindl-Rast, 2004). In these stories, individuals are reminded and encouraged to express and experience thanks to friends, parents, authority figures, legendary sages, social institutions, belief systems, animals, natural or supernatural forces, and even one's enemies. In religious contexts, expressions of gratitude toward a central religious figure (e.g., the Abrahamic religions' God, the Buddha) are often offered as part of prayer, religious rituals, and everyday

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rituals like meals. Cultural master narratives of origin myths (in which the universe is created by a god in human form, animal form, an egg, etc.) emphasize the importance of gratitude toward the creator or creation itself (Campbell, 1988).

Similarly, stories in (especially Westernized, industrialized) cultures emphasize the virtue of authenticity—the ideal of being oneself, being true to oneself, and being the genuine article. From commercial advertising to literature and film, individuals are advised from a young age to "be yourself." The ideal of authenticity as a cultural master narrative is found in perhaps its most crystallized form in the *Bildungsroman* genre of literature, featuring coming-of-age and character-development stories (Bauer, 2016). Generally speaking, the *Bildungsroman* protagonist rejects mainstream life and values, sets off on a course of personal adventure, receives training from a master (e.g., in the arts or spirituality), is tested by evil forces (generally symbolizing features of mainstream life), masters them, and returns to society to help or transform it—all the while developing an increasingly authentic understanding of oneself (Jeffers, 2005).

Narrative Tools of Self-Authorship

Individuals identify with cultural master narratives of gratitude and authenticity in an attempt to live out these virtues and to construct a good life story—a life story of a good life. But individuals do not simply buy into cultural master narratives wholesale. Individuals do not simply try to turn their lives into an exact replica of a cultural master narrative. Instead, individuals treat cultural master narratives like a buffet, ingesting only the features of those stories that the individual finds palatable. Cultures do shape what most individuals will find palatable, but individuals' tastes also vary widely. In drawing on cultural master narratives, individuals select this value, that image, this script, that character prototype, and so on, thereby creating a relatively unique life story, somewhat like a plate in a buffet (if only it were that easy, or that tasty).

Let's switch metaphors from a buffet to the construction of a building. To construct meaning in her life story, the person relies on the same narrative tools that writers of cultural master narratives use—tools like narrative tones, imagery, themes, structure, scripts, and character prototypes. Two narrative tools that are especially relevant to the present topic are narrative *theme* and narrative *structure*. (Importantly for research, all these tools of self-authorship can be measured by first asking people to tell or to write personal narratives and then by identifying systematically the degree to which these tools—tones, themes, structures—are featured in the narratives, and finally by describing those features either quantitatively or qualitatively.)

Themes of Gratitude and Authenticity

Narrative themes tell us why a person or event is important. Themes reveal what the narrator or various characters in a story value, want, and are motivated by. Narrative theme is a tool for harnessing abstract values and motives onto the concrete events and people in a story. Agency and communion are two of life's greatest themes, encompassing a range of values and motives, such as (respectively) power and love, independence and dependence, and mastery and nurturance (McAdams, 1993). Themes serve as a character's or narrator's meaningful basis of interpretation and reasons, justifications, and purposes of action. Virtues, like other types of value, serve as themes in life stories (Bauer, 2016). The virtues of gratitude and authenticity serve as themes in the life stories of people who identify with those virtues. People convey their valuing and identifying with virtues in personal narratives that feature the person possessing, seeking, or otherwise being motivated by those virtues (Bauer & DesAutels, in press). Gratitude or authenticity can be said to characterize a person's narrative self-identity when themes of gratitude or authenticity surface in many of the episodes of that person's life story.

Themes of virtuous growth. A third great theme of life stories is growth—and more particularly, eudaimonic growth (Bauer, 2016). Whereas themes of agency and communion deal with orientations toward the individual person and others (respectively), which might be thought of as orientations in psychosocial space, the theme of growth deals with an orientation toward psychosocial *time*. Growth themes can come in the form of or overlap with either agentic or communal themes. More important for the study of gratitude and authenticity, however, is the *humanistic* (rather than materialistic, egoistic, or economistic) value orientation of growth themes (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008). Narrative growth themes focus on humanistic concerns of cultivating deeper personal experiences via personally meaningful activities and relationships, rather than materialistic or egoistic concerns for social status, self-image, physical appearance, approval-seeking or approval-gaining, and other concerns that reflect an economistic view of personhood. Humanistic values and narrative themes facilitate virtuous development and well-being years later (Bauer & McAdams, 2010; Kasser, Koestner, & Lekes, 2002; Kasser & Ryan, 1996). While economistic concerns are also important to consider in navigating the pragmatics of life, humanistic concerns are more directly tied to the development of virtues like gratitude and authenticity (e.g., Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono, & Wilson, 2011; Kernis, 2003; Wood et al., 2010).

The theme of gratitude. The expression of gratitude is relatively easy to detect in a narrative: statements of thanks or appreciation for others generally indicate a valuing of others' help. Gratitude involves an attribution of beneficent agency to the other (McCullough & Tsang, 2004), which is to say,

a *valuing* of a particular person and a particular kind of action. The valuing of a particular kind of action is what makes gratitude a theme in narratives: gratitude in a narrative reveals the narrator's valuing of helpful behavior.

On the topic of helpful behavior itself, we note that helping oneself is not a virtue of gratitude. But expressions of genuine gratitude are not selfish, even if they serve the self in a relationship of reciprocal social exchange (DeSteno et al., 2010). Expressions of gratitude reflect an acknowledgment of the moral good of helping (Emmons, 2004). Consider the converse: when a personal narrative describes how the narrator cared for others, the narrative has a communal theme, expressing a personal valuing of caring (McAdams, 1993). Narratives that express personal contributions to the welfare of future generations have themes of generativity (McAdams & Guo, 2015), a developmentally salient theme that we examine later. Thus, expressions of gratitude—even in their simplest forms (see section on narrative structure)—reflect a personal value orientation toward the virtue of helping.

Furthermore, themes of gratitude in a narrative, as expressions of genuine gratitude, are *self-reflections, not social-exchange paybacks*. The expression of gratitude in a life story or a personal narrative is not the same as the expression of gratitude in real time, when individuals say or otherwise express thanks for what others have given to oneself. Narrated gratitude is a *reflection* on a past event in which the narrator is conveying to the listener—and to oneself—the importance of expressing thanks for benefits received. Again, the expression of gratitude in a personal narrative, which is more reflective than expressing gratitude in situ, reveals that the person *values* gratitude—or at the very least recognizes the personal benefit of expressing gratitude.

The theme of authenticity. Authenticity is more difficult than gratitude to detect in a life story (from the researcher's perspective). This difficulty reflects how much more difficult it is to live authentically and to articulate doing so than it is to experience and express gratitude (from the narrator's perspective). Authenticity as a theme in a narrative comes in both essentialist and existentialist forms, as distinguished earlier.

To give some examples of what authenticity sounds like from essentialist and existentialist perspectives, the following excerpts come from a self-report questionnaire, the Essentialist and Existentialist Authenticity Scale (EEAS; Shanahan & Bauer, in preparation). Themes of essentialist authenticity convey the value of acting in accord with personality characteristics that are deeply embedded, whether by nature or nurture. These themes come in forms like "my true self is who I was meant to be, as defined by my divinely created soul," "my true self is who I was born to be, as defined by my genetics," and "my soul or inner essence is unchanging. It is the foundation of my authentic self." Themes of existentialist authenticity come in forms like

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"my true self is who I want myself to be, as defined by careful reflection that I have done," "my self-identity and beliefs are evolving. They are the foundation of my authentic self," and "an authentic person builds on their best traits while working on changing their worst traits." Now, these excerpts are generic abstractions of specific themes in people's life stories, but they convey the kinds of concerns that emerge in people's life stories as themes. Again, themes of existentialist authenticity also involve an emphasis on self-discovery, for example, "I've worked hard for years to discover who I really am." As noted earlier, even though the idea of self-discovery assumes an essentialist belief in an inner essence, self-discovery also involves a personal *choice* not to cultivate unvirtuous personality tendencies—while accepting them as part of one's personhood—in favor of pursuing other tendencies that one deems more virtuous. Beliefs in authenticity that emphasize the essentialism of personality (e.g., McGregor et al., 2006) eschew the notion that authenticity necessarily has anything to do with morality and virtue.

Narrative Structure of Gratitude and Authenticity

Narrative structure is how the content in a story (notably themes) is organized, most prominently by degrees of complexity and coherence (e.g., Habermas & de Silveira, 2008; Suedfeld & Bluck, 1993). Some stories are simple, such as children's stories in which each character has a single theme (e.g., courage). Other stories are complex, and thus more compelling to adults, as when each character has multiple and conflicting themes (e.g., motives for power and love, and major life decisions that hang in the balance). Similarly, some stories are incoherent and fragmented, whereas other stories are coherent and integrated. Fragmented stories can be simple or complex, just as coherent stories can be.

Any one meaningful event in a life story can be interpreted (and communicated) simplistically or complexly—as can the virtues of gratitude or authenticity. Gratitude can be expressed in a narrative with a simple "I'm really thankful that . . ." or else complexly by elaborating on the reasons and ways in which the narrator is grateful. Similarly, authenticity can be expressed in a narrative with a simple "I've always been true to myself" or else complexly by elaborating on the reasons and ways in which the narrator believes himself to be (or to have been) authentic.

Narrative structure lies at the heart of an entire branch of the study of self-identity development that is informed by Piaget (1970). Neo-Piagetian theories of self-identity development (e.g., Damon & Hart, 1988; Kegan, 1982; Loevinger, 1976) shed light on the dynamic development of gratitude, authenticity, and self-authorship.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRATITUDE, AUTHENTICITY, AND SELF-AUTHORSHIP

As self-authorship develops, so does the individual's understanding and experience of gratitude and authenticity. The development of these two virtues unfolds according to developments in the narrative themes and structure of one's self-authorship. In addition, gratitude, authenticity, and self-authorship scaffold the development of each other toward an increasingly interdependent, humanistic, and complex understanding of personal experience and a good life. In this section, we consider the development of gratitude and authenticity as they unfold at different stages of self-authorship. We pay particular attention to the development of authentic gratitude and grateful authenticity.

Before We Start: Enacting Virtue versus Narrating Virtue

To be clear, in this section, we focus on the development of the *self-authorship of* gratitude and authenticity, which is not quite the same as the development of gratitude itself and authenticity itself. As mentioned earlier, it is one thing to express gratitude in situ; it is another thing to use gratitude as a theme in one's life story. The former demands little reflection, as when a child says "thank you" by rote; the latter demands self-reflection on the importance of giving thanks in one's life. As for authenticity, it is one thing to live authentically and another to articulate the importance of authenticity in one's life story.

The capacity to enact gratitude develops earlier than the capacity to enact authenticity, as will be explained in this section. Gratitude is akin to the foundation for constructing a good life (and thus built into social norms), whereas authenticity is more like the architectural ornament of a good life (and thus more a refinement than a necessity). Not to diminish the importance of authenticity: just as architecture gives a building its distinct character and a particular measure of excellence (as in Aristotelian *arete* in a good life), authenticity is a hallmark of excellence in a good life story (Guignon, 2004; Taylor, 1991).

Furthermore, the differences between *enacting* gratitude and authenticity and *narrating* gratitude and authenticity are asymmetric. Whereas gratitude is easier to enact than to narrate, authenticity is easier to narrate than to enact. The expression of gratitude (saying "thank you") can be learned earlier in life than one's genuine experience of it. The development of expressing and even experiencing gratitude probably does *not* demand that one use themes of gratitude in one's life story; many more people say "thank you" in situ than express thanks in their life stories (McAdams & Bauer, 2004). In contrast,

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the development of expressing and experiencing authenticity probably *does* demand that one use themes of authenticity in one's life story; authenticity requires a relatively coherent narrative self-identity that corresponds to one's actions. In other words, we can probably be routinely grateful without identifying especially with efforts toward gratitude, whereas we probably cannot be routinely authentic without identifying with efforts toward authenticity. Existential authenticity is too difficult to enact in one's life without personally meaningful efforts to do so.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATIVE THEMES AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Narrative themes and narrative structure both develop interactively. Narrative structure organizes narrative themes in their degrees of complexity and coherence, just as narrative themes orient narrative structure (which alone is content- and value-free) toward the lived values and experiences of actual lives.

Yet theme and structure also develop independently. For instance, a theme of gratitude may remain a constant feature of self-authorship throughout a person's life, but the structure of that theme is likely to change drastically. For example, the gratitude of a child is egoistic and self-protective (saying "thank you" because one was told to do so or to get praise from an authority figure), whereas the gratitude of an adolescent or adult is more likely to be authentic (saying "thank you" because one experiences another's beneficence and wants to make the other experience good feelings for helping).

In the following sections, we present the development of gratitude, authenticity, and self-authorship according to age-based life periods, which is admittedly clunky (e.g., age is a crude guide for psychological maturity). For gratitude, we focus on the development of the expression and the experience of gratitude, where authentic gratitude requires an experience of gratitude. For authenticity, we focus on existentialist (not essentialist) authenticity, which is largely a non-issue before adolescence and the development of a relatively coherent and comprehensive life story (McAdams, 1993; McLean et al., 2007).

Childhood: The Emergence of Authentic Gratitude

No one is born grateful. However, infants develop capacities that seem necessary for the expression and experience of gratitude, such as empathy and making inferences of intentionality in others. For instance, infants exhibit "social smiling"—that is, smiling as a socially coordinated response to another person's smile rather than smiling as merely a reflex to physical

pleasure—reliably by two months of age (Messinger & Fogel, 2007). Yet social smiling is surely not gratitude, even though we might infer the seeds of gratitude there. As a cognitively more advanced phenomenon, empathy seems to develop in infancy and certainly by toddlerhood (Eisenberg, 2000). Inferring intentionality (i.e., recognizing that others intend certain behaviors, such as those that benefit oneself) also seems to develop in infancy (Gergely, Nádasdy, Csibra, & Bíró, 1995), and to the point of detecting false beliefs and a theory of others' minds by the preschool ages (Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001)—developmental capacities that seem to be required for gratitude (McAdams & Bauer, 2004). Preschool children can be taught to express gratitude routinely (saying "thank you" in appropriate situations), but the likelihood of their doing so has been shown to quadruple by later childhood (Gleason & Weintraub, 1976).

The experience of gratitude—which is to say, genuine or authentic gratitude—is also learned, but probably not until middle or late childhood, in the wake of learning to express gratitude, which is enhanced by parental or others' encouragement to take the perspective of the benefactor (Froh et al., 2007). Thematically, then, children develop the capacity to *value* gratitude around this time. Structurally, children around the ages eight to ten start to narrate the self and others in terms of the *individuality* of personhood, revealing their understanding that others have routine, distinct personality characteristics, and intentions, just as they themselves do (Damon & Hart, 1988). The perspective-taking required for such complexity of thought likely enhances the child's capacity for appreciating another's beneficent acts—the experience of gratitude. By the middle-school years, gratitude serves as a moral motive and a predictor of social integration (Froh et al., 2010), suggesting both themes of group identification that mark a transition from the egoistic stages of self-identity structure to more groupish and conformist stages (e.g., Loevinger, 1976).

So older children seem to develop a capacity for "authentic gratitude" and for identifying with the idea of gratitude as a moral good. From there gratitude develops as one comes to think more deeply and complexly—and authentically—about the self and others.

Adolescence-Plus: Proto-Authenticity and Principled Gratitude

Adolescence and emerging adulthood—the term for roughly ages eighteen to twenty-five that serves as an extended adolescence in modern, industrialized cultures (Arnett, 2000)—is a time for figuring out one's definition and place in the world. Erik Erikson's (1950) label for this stage of development is "identity versus role confusion." Identity refers to one's understanding of

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who one is, particularly in terms of values or personally meaningful concerns, where that understanding emerges in the wake of both considerable exploration of alternative values, and commitment to a set of values of one's own. To self-author an identity in this sense, one must know where one stands in society, relative to others; one must not only know the social roles that one plays in life but also have a relatively solid sense of the underlying values of those roles in one's culture. In their narrative self-identity, if all goes well by Eriksonian standards, adolescents and emerging adults are searching for and selecting themes of values and virtues that will anchor their developing life stories. Lacking such themes with which to identify amounts to being confused with regard to one's role in society.

Structurally, the commitment to a set of self-examined values amounts to thematic coherence in one's life story. The lack of committed values expresses itself in a lower degree of thematic coherence. But commitment and coherence can be either simplistic or complex. Structural complexity develops with the differentiation of perspectives on values and persons, as when adolescents try to break free of the limited perspectives of their upbringing—the perspectives engendered by their parents, their schools, their religion, and other authoritative persons and institutions. In adolescence, if self-authorship continues to develop structurally, one moves from a more conformist positioning of the self and others toward a more conscientious positioning that is driven by critical thinking (Loevinger, 1976). Self-authorship shifts from valuing the self by others' standards (e.g., hinging one's self-worth on what others say) to valuing the self in terms of critically examined, systematic beliefs, plans, and principles (Damon & Hart, 1988). Critical reasoning simply requires greater perspective-taking than does conformity, and the person who comes to exercise (and identify with) critical reasoning rather than conformist reasoning comes to self-author an identity with greater complexity, with implications for gratitude and authenticity.

Adolescent gratitude. Gratitude at this stage involves an appreciation, both experienced and expressed, of other people for their having helped oneself to become oneself. At this stage, one's capacity for gratitude has a self-focused quality that is characteristic of adolescent thinking: The notion of being grateful is *still routinely rooted in social exchange*, where individuals come in contact with each other and may decide to help each other. While adolescents may have glimpses of gratitude for being part of something larger than themselves (as with peak, mystical, or transcendent experiences), *gratitude at this stage is still about the individualistically defined self who receives goods from other individualistically defined persons*. For example, perceptions that a partner has expressed gratitude correlates with perceptions that "my partner saw the 'real' me" (Algoe et al., 2013). While gratitude at this stage is genuine (as in later childhood), it is limited by the adolescent's capacity to be genuine or authentic in the first place (see further).

Despite these limitations, gratitude is likely to have become more principled with the thematic and structural development of self-authorship in adolescence. As one comes to identify with particular values (i.e., to self-author with particular themes), one comes to be grateful in a more concentrated way for the people and forces that facilitate those values. As self-authorship develops toward greater structural complexity, one comes to identify with abstract principles and underlying causes and processes—including those that facilitate gratitude. One's understanding of gratitude becomes more principled, where gratitude is not just something important to express interpersonally but is also integral to social cohesion on a larger scale.

Adolescent authenticity. Authenticity is a matter of being true to oneself, so authenticity serves as an ideal or guiding principle for the entire project of identity development, particularly in Erikson's seminal sense of the term. However, authenticity at this stage of development is not the authenticity of the psychosocially mature person. Perhaps we would better frame the underlying phenomenon as "autonomy." For the adolescent, autonomy means independence, whereas for the mature adult, autonomy means something more like existential authenticity (Bauer, in press). In adolescence and emerging adulthood, one's sense of autonomy is defined by one's independence from parents and other authority figures, cast largely in terms of finances, being told what to do, and choosing one's social roles. Attaining these freedoms is a monumental task, and not coincidentally these capacities emerge around the time that self-authorship proper—that is, narrative self-identity—develops into its relatively adult form (McAdams, 1993; McLean et al., 2007). This is not to say that adolescents cannot be authentic; of course they can. Adolescents can certainly take stands and follow paths of their own in ways that resonate with deeply held and even self-examined beliefs. But the adolescent's understanding of self as an individual is—compared to the mature adult's self-identity—too shallow, too inexperienced, too lacking in perspectivity (see next section on structural development), and importantly too lacking in an embedded sense of interdependence to be consonant with what is known as existential authenticity (e.g., Guignon, 2004). So the existential authenticity at this stage is more like a proto-authenticity than authenticity proper.

Then again, we can see the seeds of interdependent thinking in the structural complexity and principled nature of thinking that is possible at this stage. (We note that the term "interdependent" in a developmental sense refers to a view of self and others that is post-conformist, and even post-independent via critical-thinking. Interdependence refers to a model of personhood that values both individuality and its social embeddedness, that is, interindividuality—Kegan, 1982.) Thinking at this stage is not yet interdependent (e.g., Kegan; Loevinger, 1976), so while we can find authentic gratitude here, gratitude as

a principle is more idealistic than contextualized, much like the life stories of adolescents in general (McAdams, 1993).

Adulthood: Existentialist Authenticity and Deep Gratitude

Adulthood encompasses a range of expectable themes for self-authorship and levels of structural development. As a source of narrative themes, Erikson's theory provides three values or motives around which young, midlife, and older adults tend to anchor the meaning of their life stories, respectively: intimacy, generativity, and ego integrity. Structurally, based on measures of Loevinger's (1976) ego development, self-authorship spans from routinely self-protective and egoistic perspectives to strictly conformist, a combination of conformist and conscientious, conscientious (i.e., the routinely critical-thinking stage mentioned earlier that develops at the earliest in late adolescence or emerging adulthood), and three advanced stages that identify with interdependent views of personhood that were mentioned earlier. In this section, we consider the implications of Erikson's and Loevinger's theories of development on the development of gratitude and authenticity—and on authentic gratitude and grateful authenticity—in adulthood.

Intimacy and interpersonal interdependence. In Erikson's (1950) theory, young adulthood is the period in life (again, in modern, Western cultures at this time in history) that individuals work on establishing intimacy in their lives. Intimacy refers to a mature, reciprocal relationship with another person. Isolation is the lack of such a connection (the stage is called "intimacy versus isolation"). From Erikson's point of view, intimacy is not merely about having a committed relationship but rather about the development of a genuinely mutual relationship. At this point, the abstract, adolescent ideal of interdependence develops into a more lived, experienced interdependence in the context of mutually intimate relationships, as one values and acts upon an understanding (however intuitive) of one's interpersonal interdependence.

An early sense of existential authenticity proper seems capable of emerging around this period of development. Indeed, we argue that the development of existential authenticity underlies Erikson's placing the intimacy stage after the identity stage: intimacy in Erikson's sense can develop only after one has established a relatively authentic understanding of oneself (for empirical support, see Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). A sense of one's own self-examined values (from the earlier stage) deepens with more years of experience in trying to enact those values in real-life contexts. Intimate relationships test that enactment. A nascent existential authenticity hedges against the possibility that one either too readily imposes one's beliefs on others or too readily capitulates to the other's beliefs. Such are the hazards of committing to a relationship before one has established a set of self-examined

values. In addition, in the stage of intimacy, if all goes well, the person can give and want to give "autonomy support," the phenomenon of supporting another's autonomy without risk of forfeiting one's own autonomy (and indeed facilitating it—Deci, 1995). Self-identity becomes known to oneself as a dialogical process, with two individuals developing in their own autonomous ways in conjunction, with the mutual relationship as a valued good in itself—an interpersonal interdependence.

Gratitude in the sense of intimacy is not merely a matter of being thankful that the other person helps one to become oneself. As with stages in most developmental theories, the person does not simply discard any concerns or abilities from previous stages upon reaching a later stage. Rather, the person *adds* concerns and abilities to the previous stages' concerns and abilities. Stages are cumulative, not substitutive. Thus, in addition to more commonly understood notions of gratitude—thankfulness to another person or supernatural force for a particular good bestowed—the person at the present stage develops the capacity to be thankful for what is at least an inherently interdependent facet of one's life. Gratitude takes on a mutually shared meaning, compatible with the structural complexity of Loevinger's (1976) individualistic stage (at least in relationship contexts). This stage involves a recognition of gratitude (and its opposite, blame) as an emotion that affects the person not in the abstract, but in the personal context of intersubjective relations (Labouvie-Vief & Medler, 2002) between the self and others. An intimate relationship has not only emotions and values but their development over time at its core (Loevinger, 1976). Especially at higher stages of development, one can be thankful *for* the authentically mutual relationship itself (in addition to the actual persons in that relationship) and thankful *to* the relationship itself. Similarly, one can be thankful to or for one's family and to or for the universe or cosmos (see Chappell, this volume), even though one is part of one's family and of the cosmos.

As suggested in the section on adolescence, neither Erikson nor we are claiming that adolescents cannot experience gratitude toward relations (or groups or abstract principles). Of course they do (e.g., gratitude toward their families, their country, their god). Instead, we are pointing to differences in the self-identification of those things not merely as abstract ideas but as lived experiences (see Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). Adolescents typically express thankfulness to their boyfriends and girlfriends, but that thankfulness is for gifts such as "helping me be myself" and "loving me for who I am" (good things to be sure), rather than for gifts such as a mutually constructed life space and other mutually planned-and-lived phenomena that color broad spans of one's activities for years. Few adolescents can understand, articulate, or enact such a phenomenon—or thus feel grateful for it.

Generativity and organismic interdependence. In midlife, life stories more commonly take on themes of generativity (McAdams & Guo, 2015;

Peterson, 2002), the Eriksonian concern for and commitment to fostering the welfare of future generations of society—and even of the species. Having such concerns and acting on them, Erikson says, is an integral part of psychological health and well-being for adults in midlife. Not to have such concerns or not to act on them leads the person toward a sense of stagnation, a sense of not contributing to something larger than oneself. Generative actions come in many forms, including the more obvious instances like parenting, teaching, coaching, and mentoring. These actions can have multiple motives. What matters for generativity as a theme of self-authorship is the individual's motive to care for others, society, and humanity (de St. Aubin, 2013). While an overarching concern for generativity is not necessary for gratitude, generative concern deepens gratitude, extending it beyond the interpersonal realm, toward society or even humanity and its future generations (McAdams & Bauer, 2004).

In contrast to the sense of autonomy as independence in adolescence and emerging adulthood, the sense of autonomy can more likely emerge as existential authenticity—in its fuller, ethically framed sense—at the present stage of development. Midlife has afforded the individual decades of experience in trying to enact her values and ideals. By trial and error, if all goes well, the individual has developed the capacity to understand how those values and ideals actually pan out in the varied contexts and vicissitudes of everyday life—a life with other individuals, groups, institutions, and perhaps cultures and a sense of history. At this point in development, one's understanding of interdependence moves beyond the interpersonal to become dynamic, systemic, and organismic (Bauer, in press)—an understanding of persons as self-organizing systems within broader systems of persons—and then in a lived, concrete sense rather than merely the idealistic sense of adolescence.

If one has continued to develop psychosocially, the person has honed his values and ideals to reflect what is possible, given the restraints of life—as Tiberius (2008) puts it, "living wisely within our limits." Such thinking corresponds to the advanced individualistic or early autonomous stage of ego development (Loevinger, 1976) and to the interindividual stage of self-development (Kegan, 1982). Self-authorship positions the self and others in an interdependent relation. This interdependence functions not just in relationships (as in Erikson's stage of intimacy) but also in *all* relations, from interpersonal to collective, as a pervasive quality of personhood.

Existentially authentic gratitude. Gratitude takes shape accordingly. Generativity is to no small degree a monumental expression of gratitude to society or even the world (McAdams & Bauer, 2004; on cosmic gratitude, see Chappell, this volume). At this point, one identifies not just with him- or herself, set with or against other individuals (as in Erikson's stage of identity), and not just as merged with another person (as in the intimacy stage), but now

one identifies with future generations of society, even the species. Gratitude becomes similarly multifaceted, expressed at interpersonal, mutually relational, and multiplicatively relational forms. As mentioned earlier, we are not claiming that adolescents or young adults cannot experience gratitude for society and other abstract phenomena as just that—abstract phenomena. Youth certainly express concerns for generativity, as when they wish to do volunteer work to help children or society. Such generative concern among young adolescents and young adults has been shown to correlate with a sense of gratitude (Froh et al., 2010; Sandage, Hill, & Vaubel, 2010). However, we are claiming that youth are, on average, limited by their fewer experiences in life and in their understanding of the intricacies of what it means to live in a society, permeated as it is by political, religious, socioeconomic, and other cultural values that either support or suppress one's own values. Those growing up in conditions of poverty or other forms of oppression (e.g., racial, ethnic, and gendered) come to understand the perils of interdependent personhood (e.g., Bhatia, 2007; Hammack, 2011; Nussbaum, 2000). In any case, the structural development of interdependent self-authorship emerges from decades of experience in trying to live out one's values in real-life contexts and recognizing palpably the difficulty of doing so.

Grateful authenticity. Authenticity can emerge in its full existential force, with *grateful* authenticity as a natural extension of perceiving personhood as a nexus of interdependent experience. Gratitude reaches a level of depth that is not merely principled and idealistic but also contextualized, with the appreciation of virtues enacted despite both external and internal hurdles. Authentic gratitude, which first emerged in late childhood, becomes existentially authentic gratitude.

NOTE

1 The other two dimensions are "authentic living" and another antithetical dimension, self-alienation; antithetical scores are reversed and then added to authentic-living scores.

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