

## Gratitude to Nature

*Tony Manela*

In this article, I consider the claim that we ought to be grateful to nature and argue that this claim is unjustified. I proceed by arguing against the two most plausible lines of reasoning for the claim that we ought to be grateful to nature: 1) that nature is a fitting or appropriate object of our gratitude, and 2) that we ought to be grateful to nature insofar as gratitude to nature enhances, preserves or indicates in us the virtue of gratitude, a character trait we morally ought to have. My arguments against the first line of reasoning show it to be unsound, and my arguments against the second reveal that we actually have reasons to avoid being grateful to nature. If we have reasons to treat nature well, I show, those may be rooted in the appropriateness of attitudes like praise, appreciation or compassion, but not gratitude. I conclude by highlighting several implications my arguments entail about gratitude to entities other than nature and about environmental virtues other than gratitude.

### ***Keywords***

anthropomorphism, environment, gratitude, intention, nature, virtue

Insofar as nature can be distinguished from human beings, it seems undeniable that nature benefits human beings. Should we be grateful to nature for the benefits it confers on us? The question is an important one, given the implications of an affirmative answer. To be grateful to someone or to something entails having a special care for that entity—a care that manifests itself not only in certain feelings, but in certain behaviour as well. To be grateful to nature is, in part, to be inclined to look out for it, to benefit it, to take special care to avoid harming it, to stand up for it when others perpetrate harm against it. Furthermore, insofar as we should be grateful to nature, such grateful behaviours are not supererogatory. A person who is not grateful when he should be falls short not simply of a moral ideal or a standard of excellence, but of a moral expectation, duty or requirement. Indeed, we generally only think about gratitude when it is

called for but absent—that is, only in the face of ingratitude, considered to be among the basest of moral shortcomings. Thus, given certain plausible assumptions about how much human beings have been benefited by nature and how much harm human beings cause or allow to happen to nature, the question of whether we should be grateful to nature is a significant one.

Most contemporary western philosophers who have considered this question have suggested or endorsed an affirmative answer.<sup>1</sup> In this article, my goal is to demonstrate that these philosophers are mistaken: it is not the case that we ought to be grateful to nature. I begin in section I by defining ‘gratitude’ and ‘nature’ and specifying the question I aim to answer in this article. In sections II and III, I consider and reject the two most promising lines of reasoning for the claim that we ought to be grateful to nature. The first line of reasoning reaches its conclusion from the premise that gratitude to nature is fitting or appropriate, given certain features of the way nature benefits us. The second line of reasoning draws the same conclusion from the claim that being grateful to nature is indicative of or instrumental in developing a character trait (the virtue of gratitude) that is morally good for us to have. My refutations of both lines of reasoning have implications for debates in moral philosophy beyond the question of

---

<sup>1</sup> These include, among others, Thomas Hill (1983), Robert Chapman (2002), Sean McAleer (2004 and 2012), Philip Cafaro (2005), Rosalind Hursthouse (2007), Karen Bardsley (2013), and Patrick Boleyn-Fitzgerald (2016). Hill (1983: §2) argues that we should be grateful to nature because insofar as we are not, this may indicate a morally problematic deficiency in or the absence of an important character trait. Hursthouse (2007: 161) also conceptualizes gratitude as a virtue, and includes gratitude as one of the important virtues concerned with our relationship to nature. Chapman (2002: 137 – 138) argues that gratitude toward nature promotes wilderness and harmony, two environmental values. McAleer (2004 and 2012) argues that nature can be a fitting object of gratitude, and that gratitude to natural objects or environments is justified because gratitude instantiates humility, an important environmental virtue. Cafaro (2005: 143) suggests that gratitude to nature may be the complement of the vice of gluttony, and suggests that giving thanks may be an important way to offset this vice and to help us understand and accept our environmental responsibilities. Boleyn-Fitzgerald (2016) argues that we sometimes ought to be grateful to natural objects or environments for many of the same reasons we sometimes ought to be grateful to other human beings, and he argues further that even if such attitudes require us to personify or anthropomorphize nature and natural objects, such anthropomorphism is not morally problematic. And Bardsley (2013) argues that even if we do not personify or anthropomorphize nature, it still well may be an appropriate or fitting object of our gratitude for the same reasons that typical human benefactors can be. I will discuss the strongest of these arguments in more detail in sections II and III below. In contrast to the philosophers who put forward these arguments, the only recent philosopher who argues explicitly *against* the claim that we ought to be grateful to nature dedicates just a paragraph to his argument. See Altshuler (2014: 473 – 4).

gratitude to nature, and in the final two sections of this article, I highlight two ways in which these failures to justify gratitude to nature inform those debates. In section IV, I show that my arguments reveal that gratitude is only ever appropriate toward someone or something capable of forming intentions, and so, while the appropriateness of gratitude to certain nonhuman animals remains a possibility, the notion that we might sometimes owe gratitude to inanimate objects is false. In section V, I show that my arguments cast doubt on an extensionist trend in environmental ethics that seeks to include nonhuman organisms, natural objects, whole ecosystems and nature itself as proper objects of a range of social virtues other than the virtue of gratitude—virtues that include friendship, goodwill, and mercy.

### I. Preliminary Remarks on Gratitude and Nature

Before I begin, several clarifications are in order. The first addresses an ambiguity in the notion of gratitude at play in the general question of whether gratitude concerning nature is an attitude human beings ought at least sometimes to instantiate. In asking this general question we might, on the one hand, be wondering whether we ought to be grateful *to* nature, or we might, on the other hand, be wondering whether we ought to be grateful *for* nature. Understanding the difference between these two more specific questions is essential to determining which question is of more interest to environmental ethicists.

Consider first what it means to be grateful *to* someone or something, a phenomenon expressed in such locutions as ‘I am grateful to a stranger for coming to my rescue,’ ‘I am grateful to my mentor for all her time and attention,’ and ‘I am grateful to my parents.’ As these examples show, typically when a beneficiary says he is grateful *to* someone, he is grateful to her

for something she has done that has benefited him—some benefit she has conferred on him.<sup>2,3</sup>

This indicates that in the vaguest terms, gratitude *to* is a proper or fitting response to a benefactor's conferring certain benefits—to a benefactor's beneficence.<sup>4</sup> What does this response consist in? Typically, it involves at least an acknowledgment in the form of thanking. It also seems to include certain feelings—namely, what we might think of as feelings of goodwill toward a benefactor.<sup>5</sup> It would seem strange, after all, for me to claim to be grateful to my mentor for giving me so much time and attention and yet find myself with no additional goodwill toward her—no tendency to be happy when I hear things are going well for her, upset when I learn that things are going poorly for her. Gratitude *to* entails more than just feelings, however; it also entails certain behaviours or behavioural dispositions on the part of the beneficiary. It involves, for instance, a disposition to reciprocate favours a benefactor has done for a beneficiary, a disposition to aid the benefactor if she needs help in the future, and a disposition to avoid harming her.<sup>6</sup> If I find out that a stranger who once came to my rescue is now in need of similar rescuing, and I can rescue her at little risk to myself, then no matter if I thank her or bear her feelings of goodwill, it seems false to say I am grateful to her if I find myself completely unmotivated to help her. Gratitude, then, includes certain behavioural dispositions—what we might call dispositions of grateful beneficence and grateful nonmaleficence toward a benefactor.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of clarity, I will generally refer to beneficiaries with masculine pronouns and benefactors with feminine pronouns in the gratitude-relevant examples and generalizations I give throughout this article.

<sup>3</sup> Some might deny that gratitude *to* locutions always refer to a proper response to beneficence; but it is difficult to imagine a plausible case of some benefactor, R, and some beneficiary, Y, such that Y should be grateful to R despite R's never having benefited Y in any sense.

<sup>4</sup> Exactly what further conditions ensure that gratitude fitting or appropriate in a given case is a much larger question—one I will address in more detail in the following section.

<sup>5</sup> Those who note this include Walker (1980-1981: 50 – 51) and Manela (2016b).

<sup>6</sup> For arguments that gratitude entails a disposition of reciprocity, see Manela (2016a: §2). For arguments that gratitude entails dispositions of nonmaleficence, see Walker (1980-1981: 49) and Manela (2015: §1).

<sup>7</sup> Someone might object to this claim on the grounds that it seems we should sometimes be grateful to benefactors who benefited us in the past but are currently deceased. Insofar as they are dead, it might be argued, such benefactors cannot be benefited, and so if we are to be grateful *to* such entities, benefiting such entities cannot be an essential part of gratitude *to*. In response to this concern, two points are worth noting. The first is that even the

Affective goodwill and grateful beneficence and nonmaleficence entail that gratitude *to* is, broadly, a kind of care or concern on the part of the beneficiary for the benefactor—a care or concern made fitting by a benefactor’s having benefited a beneficiary in certain ways.

Now consider what it means to be grateful *for*. Often we talk of being grateful *for* something as shorthand for being grateful *to* a benefactor *for* conferring it, and in such cases, it would seem, being grateful *for* something just is being grateful *to* that benefactor for conferring it. In some cases, though, it seems we talk of being grateful *for* good things without being grateful *to* anyone in particular for them. An atheist might say, for instance, ‘I am grateful for my family,’ ‘I am grateful for a beautiful sunset,’ ‘I am grateful for the beautiful weather on my wedding day,’ or ‘I am grateful for the twenty dollars I found on the ground last week,’ without feeling grateful *to* anyone for these things. Being grateful *for*, in this sense, is the proper response to good things—things that have some value for the beneficiary.<sup>8</sup> What does this response consist in? At the very least, it seems to entail a cognitive recognition of the value of the object one is grateful for. For me to be grateful for my family is in part to be aware of its value—to never forget it or take it for granted. Gratitude *for* also seems to have an affective component—a tendency to enjoy or take pleasure in the object of my gratitude. To be grateful for a sunset is in part to enjoy and savour it. When laid out in this way, it becomes clear that to

---

deceased might very well have interests, even though these interests no longer include what we typically think of as the central interests of living, conscious human beings—things like physical health and pleasant experiences. People’s interests in their loved ones’ flourishing or in their projects’ coming to fruition may well continue after they die, and insofar as it continues to be possible to advance these interests, it continues to be possible, after a benefactor’s death, for her beneficiary to benefit her. Even if this reply is mistaken and the deceased totally lack interests that can be advanced, this need not render nonsensical the possibility that a beneficiary might have dispositions to advance such things. Just as a cat might have a disposition to kill rats in a world with no rats, a beneficiary might still well have a disposition to advance interests that turn out not to exist; so there is no reason to think this disposition cannot play an essential role in gratitude *to*.

<sup>8</sup> This value can be both instrumental or intrinsic. For example, my gratitude for twenty dollars I find on the ground is a proper response to something that is only instrumentally valuable to me. By contrast, my gratitude for a beautiful sunset or the beautiful weather on my wedding day is my response to something I value not as a means to some further end but as something valuable in itself. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to note this.

be grateful for something (but not grateful to anyone for it) is tantamount to *appreciating* that thing. In other words, to say ‘Y is grateful for T,’ where Y is a beneficiary and T is some benefit he has experienced, is equivalent to saying ‘Y appreciates T.’<sup>9</sup>

There are, then, three different questions we might ask in wondering whether we ought to be grateful concerning nature:

Q1: Should we be grateful *to* nature for benefits it confers on us?

Q2: Should we be grateful to someone or something *for* nature?

Q3: Should we be grateful *for* nature but not necessarily grateful to anyone for it?

In this article, I will not attempt to answer Q2 or Q3. Q2, while intriguing, is really a question about the benefactor or benefactors that provide us with the benefit that is nature, and answering that question would require elaboration on metaphysical and theistic premises that are outside the scope of this article.<sup>10</sup> Q3 is also an important question, but for environmental ethicists, it is less important than Q1 for at least two reasons. The first of these is that insofar as Q3 is identical to the question of whether we ought to appreciate nature, I take it the answer is obvious and uncontroversial. It seems impossible to deny that nature is, on balance, a benefit for human beings, and it is true by definition that we ought to appreciate benefits. The second reason the appreciation question is less important than the gratitude *to* question is that establishing the claim that we ought to appreciate nature doesn’t go as far as many environmental ethicists would like

---

<sup>9</sup> I make a similar point about statements of the form ‘Y is grateful that *p*,’ where *p* is a proposition, in Manela (2016a: §5).

<sup>10</sup> For a partial treatment of this question, see Taliaferro (2005: 163).

toward justifying the particular sort of criticism that seems warranted of those who harm or fail to protect nature. A person who doesn't appreciate things he should be grateful for, like the person who doesn't appreciate good weather on his wedding day or twenty dollars he finds on the ground, may fall short of certain ideals. But even if he squanders the money and fails to notice or remember the beautiful weather on his wedding day, the worst we can say of such a person, it seems, is that he is insensitive, foolish or unwise. A person who doesn't appreciate nature might be open to the same criticisms, but he will not deserve the sort of reproach, blame and indignation that environmental ethicists want to claim is often appropriate toward those who wantonly harm the environment.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, a person who should be grateful *to* nature but harms it, or fails to protect it when it is in distress, is open to a much harsher kind of criticism. Such a person is more than just insensitive, foolish or unwise—just as a person who fails to help his former rescuer is more than just foolish or unwise. Such a person is *ungrateful*—someone who is insufficiently concerned about a benefactor who benefited him; and the condemnation warranted in response to this person's ingratitude is precisely the harsh moral blame, reproach and indignation that many environmental ethicists want to say is warranted by those who wantonly harm nature. Between Q1 and Q3, it is only Q1 that implicates stakes this high. For these reasons, then, the question of whether we should be grateful *to* nature is the question I will pursue in this article.

---

<sup>11</sup> Someone might object that harsh criticism is deserved for those who fail to appreciate certain things of intrinsic value. A person who fails to appreciate his family in a way that leads them to suffer may warrant such responses as reproach, blame and indignation, for instance. One might also argue that someone who fails to appreciate a beautiful work of art, something with intrinsic aesthetic value, might also deserve blame and indignation if he fails to, say, wade into a creek to save such a work of art from being destroyed. It seems to me, though, that these cases are not counterexamples to the claim that failure to appreciate does not warrant blame or indignation. In the case of a person who fails to appreciate his family and causes them to suffer, such a person deserves blame not because he failed to appreciate his family, but because he failed to uphold certain moral responsibilities he had concerning them that are or may be independent of his reasons to appreciate them. In the case of a person who fails to appreciate a priceless work of art enough to dirty his clothes in order to save it, such a person gives us strong reason to believe he is unusually selfish or lazy; but it is clear that any condemnation he deserves for his failure here is different in kind from what he would deserve if he had let an innocent person, or worse still, a benefactor, drown or suffer harm under the same circumstances.

Before I begin, one final specification of this question is in order. The question on which I will focus is not whether we should be grateful to specific organisms we might find in nature, but whether we should be grateful to nature itself as a whole, or to whole ecosystems.<sup>12</sup> This point might raise a concern about a presupposition underlying the question of whether we ought to be grateful to nature—specifically, the presupposition that *we* and *nature* are distinct entities. As some philosophers have pointed out, nature has always already been so heavily influenced by human beings, and human beings by nature, that distinguishing the two may be impossible.<sup>13</sup> This is a serious concern for anyone who wants to argue that we ought to be grateful to nature, but I will not address it at length in this article. Instead, throughout this article I will take as a model a highly idealized scenario that distinguishes humans and nature more cleanly than could be expected in the real world, and I do this with the understanding that if even in this model it is implausible that humans ought to be grateful to nature, that claim will be, at best, just as implausible in more complex and realistic models of the relationship between humans and nature as well.

The idealized scenario I will consider is the case of a small village of human beings in the middle of a larger ecosystem that, beyond the borders of the village, is not (nor has ever been) populated by humans. The humans of the village venture out into the nearby forests, fields and mountains to hunt and to gather food, water, wood and medicinal herbs and to enjoy the sights and sounds outside the village. Though there are dangers outside the village (e.g., certain predators and pests), the materials the humans seek outside the village are relatively plentiful and easy to procure. I will refer to the humans in this scenario in the plural first-person (as ‘we’ and ‘us’), and I will refer to the totality of everything that is not the humans or the village as ‘nature.’

---

<sup>12</sup> The former question is certainly an interesting one, but it deserves an article of its own. I return to it briefly in the penultimate section of the current article.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Vogel (2002).



## II. Nature as a Fitting Object of Gratitude

The most straightforward way to argue that we ought to be grateful to nature is to show that certain features of us, nature, and our relationship to nature make gratitude to nature fitting, appropriate or warranted. Such an argument would rest on the following premises:

P1: We receive benefits from nature.

P2: Nature issues these benefits to us in a way that makes nature an appropriate or fitting object of gratitude.

The argument is valid, and P1, I will take it, is beyond dispute. The argument is vulnerable to a strong objection, however, that stems from two claims, the first of which is the widely-held claim that in order for some benefactor to be an appropriate object of a particular beneficiary's gratitude, it must be the case that the benefactor benefited that beneficiary intentionally.<sup>14</sup> Let's call this the 'standard view' about the conditions under which gratitude is fitting or appropriate. The second claim is that nature is incapable of acting intentionally. Together, the standard view and the claim that nature is incapable of intentional action entail the falsity of P2, rendering the argument above a nonstarter.

---

<sup>14</sup> Virtually every philosopher who writes about gratitude endorses this claim. See, for instance, Simmons (1979: 171), Berger (1975), Weiss (1985), and Manela (2016a).

There are several ways a defender of this argument might respond. She could, in the first place, try to argue that nature really is capable of intentional behaviour.<sup>15</sup> Proponents of this view might point out that nature does demonstrate certain persistent tendencies (e.g., the tendency to preserve homeostasis), and that some of these tendencies may be candidates for a kind of goal-directed behaviour. Proponents of this view might also note that agency comes in many different varieties, and that nature may very well possess a sort of agency that makes gratitude warranted even if nature is incapable of the sort of conscious deliberative intentional action that most human beings are capable of.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, though, this response is unsuccessful for two reasons. First, it is doubtful whether any of the apparent tendencies we see in nature actually constitute the sort of goal-directed behaviour necessary for intentional action, rather than, say, mere byproducts or side-effects of the intentional behaviours of other entities within nature.<sup>17</sup> Second, even if we grant that certain apparent tendencies in nature constitute genuine goal-directed behaviours, none of those behaviours (e.g., an ecosystem's preserving its equilibrium) are the sort of beneficent behaviour that warrants gratitude, because none of them are done or intended under the description of benefiting us. Gratitude, in order to be warranted in a beneficiary, requires not only that the benefactor be capable of intentional action, but also that the benefactor intend to benefit the beneficiary under the description 'benefit the beneficiary.' A benefactor who acts with the aim of benefiting himself or preserving himself, and only incidentally benefits those whose wellbeing is contingently tied to his own, does not deserve gratitude from all those who derive incidental benefits from his intentional action.<sup>18</sup> And it seems clear that if ecosystems

---

<sup>15</sup> Those who suggest this route include, among others, Johnson (1991) and Card (2004).

<sup>16</sup> This suggestion is put forward in Plumwood (1998) and Plumwood (2001).

<sup>17</sup> Cahen (1988). See also Andrews (1998).

<sup>18</sup> Arguments for this claim can be found in Manela (2016a: §2). I give several scenarios later in this section to make the same point.

aim at anything at all, the most they aim at is the preservation of their own stability.<sup>19</sup> There is no reason to believe that they aim to benefit particular organisms, species or populations.<sup>20</sup> So even if we grant that ecosystems are capable of intentional behaviour, nature does not benefit humans intentionally under the description ‘benefiting humans’—and that much, at least, appears necessary for our gratitude to nature to be fitting or appropriate.

Given that we lack sufficient reason to believe nature benefits us intentionally, it seems that in order to argue that nature warrants our gratitude, one must argue that an intention on the part of the benefactor to benefit the beneficiary is not necessary for gratitude to be appropriate or fitting. One recent argument to this effect comes from Karen Bardsley, who writes that gratitude to some benefactor, R, can be fitting or appropriate when two conditions obtain: (1) R is the source of an undeserved benefit, and (2) that benefit is not the product of an accidental or regrettable aspect of R.<sup>21</sup> Let’s call this Bardsley’s Thesis, or BT for short.

BT has an initial plausibility, and, some might argue, several virtues compared to the standard view. As Bardsley points out, BT allows us to make the plausible claim that a beneficiary might appropriately be grateful to nonhuman entities that do not seem capable of

---

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, most of the examples of ecosystem intention that weak panpsychists like Plumwood put forward are ecosystems’ intentions to preserve themselves.

<sup>20</sup> This is something that even weak panpsychists like Plumwood might be inclined to concede. Plumwood seems to understand intention, in the sense we might attribute to ecosystems, as causal dispositions. If an ecosystem intended to benefit its human inhabitants (under that description, rather than as a byproduct of its intention to preserve its own equilibrium), then it would be disposed to defend humans from encroachment by another species that perfectly occupies the same niche that humans occupy. But this seems implausible. Imagine that a population of another hominid species migrated into the ecosystem I described in section I above. The new species interacts with the rest of the ecosystem in just the way the human population does. Despite their similarity, however, the new hominids begin systematically exterminating and replacing the human population. It seems to me that as long as the process of extermination and replacement does not disturb the other species, organisms and other natural objects that make up the ecosystem, we have no reason to believe that nature would go out of its way to protect its human inhabitants from their slaughter. To think otherwise would be to project desires or beliefs of our own (e.g., that we are special, worthy of nature’s special consideration and intentional protection) onto nature, and this projection would seem to imply not only ignorance but arrogance. I take up this point in more detail in section III below.

<sup>21</sup> Bardsley (2013: 36).

intentions, like rescue dogs or institutions.<sup>22</sup> BT also allows us to say that gratitude may be fitting or appropriate in response to certain human actions that are so natural, fluid and spontaneous that it seems false to call them intentional in any robust sense.<sup>23</sup>

Importantly, BT entails the falsity of the standard view of the conditions under which gratitude is warranted. If a benefactor's having acted intentionally is not necessary for Bardsley's conditions (1) and (2), and if (1) and (2) are sufficient for gratitude to be warranted, then a benefactor's having acted intentionally is not necessary for that benefactor to warrant gratitude.

BT also seems to positively entail that our gratitude to nature is warranted. As Bardsley says, nature benefits us, it does so not in virtue of anything we have done to earn those benefits, and the features of nature that result in those benefits are not accidental or regrettable.<sup>24</sup> Insofar as BT is plausible and entails the appropriateness of our gratitude to nature, it appears to be a strong reply to my objection to P2, one that could save the argument that nature can be a proper or fitting object of gratitude.

Ultimately, though, BT is not as plausible as it may seem at first glance. We can find reason to doubt it in cases like the following: Imagine Yorick, a vicious criminal, is being chased by Roberta, a just and virtuous police officer who wants to arrest Yorick and throw him in prison

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. (35, fn. 20).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. (34).

<sup>24</sup> Though I will not argue at length against them here, it is worth noting that these claims could be disputed. It might be argued that the benefits nature gives us are in fact deserved, insofar as human beings benefit nature in certain ways and thereby come to deserve nature's benefits as a matter of reciprocity. It might also be disputed whether the benefits humans get from nature actually result from non-accidental, non-regrettable characteristics of nature. In response to these points, Bardsley might note that even if nature itself as we know it today is thus not an appropriate object of gratitude, BT still grounds a strong argument that environments in the future may be fitting objects of gratitude. We might one day, for instance, owe gratitude to environments on planets that we have terraformed to suit our needs—environments that are beneficial and benefit us in ways that are not accidental. BT may also ground a strong argument for the fittingness of our gratitude to certain species (or individual members of species) that co-evolved with us, like domestic cats. Domestic cats reside (somewhat) agreeably in our houses and eradicate pests, and this combination of beneficial traits having arisen in them may not be purely accidental. See Driscoll, et al. (2007).

for life.<sup>25</sup> Yorick realizes that Roberta is catching up to him and will catch him unless he, Yorick, does something. Thinking quickly as he passes some railroad tracks, Yorick shoves a nearby innocent child onto the tracks and into the path of an oncoming train. Just as Yorick predicts, Roberta, being the decent person she is, breaks off her chase and risks her life to save the child, thus allowing Yorick to escape.

Here, Roberta has benefited Yorick in a way that Yorick did not deserve, and she did so from a non-accidental and non-regrettable aspect of her character.<sup>26</sup> BT tells us Yorick should be grateful to Roberta for letting him go, that Yorick's gratitude to Roberta is fitting or appropriate. But intuitively, that seems quite odd. Imagine that later that day, another officer catches and arrests Yorick and brings Yorick to the police station, where Roberta confronts him. It would seem inappropriate and irrational were Yorick to thank Roberta sincerely for letting him go (though sarcastic thanks of this sort might be just the kind of thing that would irk Roberta). It might be fair to say that Yorick should *appreciate* or *be glad that* Roberta broke off her chase, and it might be reasonable to expect Yorick to *praise* Roberta; but gratitude here seems out of place. Insofar as this is the case, an undeserved benefit that results from a non-accidental good characteristic is not sufficient to say that gratitude is warranted or appropriate. This entails that BT is mistaken and suggests that the standard view is right: what gratitude is really a proper response to is intentional beneficence, and so intention is necessary for gratitude to be appropriate.

---

<sup>25</sup> For the sake of clarity, I use paradigmatically masculine names beginning with the letter Y to designate the beneficiary and paradigmatically feminine names beginning with the letter R to designate the benefactor in this and the following gratitude-relevant scenarios. Additional third parties I identify with names beginning with the letter D.

<sup>26</sup> The fact that this situation features certain regrettable accidents, like the presence of a child and the presence of an oncoming train, does not affect BT's implication that Yorick's gratitude to Roberta is appropriate here. All that matters for gratitude to be appropriate, according to BT, is that Yorick has been benefited in a way he did not deserve by something Roberta did that was not a result of a non-accidental and non-regrettable aspect of her character.

A defender of BT might not be persuaded by my example above. Bardsley herself, for instance, suggests that it is not lack of good intention that renders gratitude unwarranted in cases like that of Yorick and Roberta; rather, it is the presence of bad intentions.<sup>27</sup> In my example above, she might argue, it is Roberta's bad intentions toward Yorick—e.g., Roberta's desire to put Yorick in prison—that make it the case that gratitude is not appropriate. If that is true, this case would not necessarily be a counterexample to BT.

It seems to me, though, that Bardsley's reply does not save BT. Consider a modified version of the case I gave above: Renee and Yorick are running away from Diana, a just and virtuous law enforcement officer who is chasing them. Diana can only arrest one of them, and she will arrest whichever one she catches up to first. As the chase wears on, Diana starts to gain on Yorick and Renee, and Yorick begins to fall behind Renee. Yorick and Renee are not partners, and each is perfectly indifferent to the other's wellbeing; neither Renee nor Yorick bear any good or ill will toward the other. Renee, however, is a somewhat decent person, while Yorick is not. As they are both running past some railroad tracks, they see an innocent child fall onto tracks and into the path of an oncoming train. Renee stops and saves the child because Renee is a decent person, and thereby allows Diana to catch up to her and arrest her first. Here, Renee has benefited Yorick, who escapes, and she has done so as a result of a laudable and non-accidental part of her character. Furthermore, Renee bears no ill will toward Yorick. But again, it seems wrong to say that Yorick owes Renee gratitude for what Renee did. It would seem improper for Yorick to thank Renee, should Yorick ever have the chance, for helping him escape. And if he did, Renee would likely reply, after the fact, quite sincerely, 'I didn't do it for you. In fact, I couldn't have cared less what happened to you. And while I don't bear you any especial ill will, and while I wasn't unhappy that you escaped, I wouldn't have lost a wink of

---

<sup>27</sup> Bardsley (2013: 36).

sleep if you'd been caught, arrested, and thrown in prison for life.' It hardly seems like gratitude is warranted or fitting in cases of such cool indifference, and yet I see no reason to doubt that this is what nature would say to those of us who thank it, if nature could speak.

Insofar as this is true, BT is indefensible: the mere absence of negative intention (together with an undeserved benefit from a non-accidental and non-regrettable characteristic of a benefactor) is not sufficient for gratitude to be appropriate. Bardsley's Thesis gives us no reason to doubt the standard view that intentions are necessary for gratitude to be appropriate;<sup>28</sup> and insofar as nature is incapable of intention, it can never be appropriate or fitting for us to be grateful to nature. If it is the case that we ought to be grateful to nature, then it cannot be because features of the relationship between us, nature, and the benefits nature conveys to us make our gratitude to nature appropriate; it must be for another reason. It is to this possibility I now turn.

### III. Nature and the Virtue of Gratitude

Even if nature is not strictly speaking an appropriate or fitting object of our gratitude, it might be thought that we still ought to be grateful to nature because there is a certain indirect or extrinsic value in being so. Thomas Hill famously argued that in failing to be grateful to nature, we evince

---

<sup>28</sup> There still remain the cases Bardsley mentions of entities that seem to be appropriate objects of gratitude even though they appear incapable of forming intentions. One of the strengths of BT was its ability to explain our intuitions in such cases; but if Bardsley's Thesis is mistaken, we continue to stand in need of an explanation for why it seems, for instance, that rescuees owe rescue dogs gratitude for saving them, or that sometimes people can owe gratitude to institutions, like universities, for benefiting them. There are several ways this concern might be addressed. The first is to argue that rescue dogs and institutions are indeed capable of intentions, though these intentions may take a different form from those experienced and formed by conscious human beings. This concern might also be addressed by arguing that even if nonhuman animals and institutions are incapable of forming genuine intentions, their behaviour may nonetheless give the convincing appearance of being genuinely intentional. This appearance may be so convincing, in fact, that a grateful person—a person with the disposition to recognize such appearances as evidence of intention—will be disposed to treat nonhuman animals and institutions that act in such ways gratefully. And insofar as we all should be grateful people, we all sometimes should react gratefully to things that appear to have benevolent intentions. I explore this possibility in more detail in the following section.

an absence of a valuable character trait or disposition that is good in itself, or good insofar as it leads us to be grateful to those who genuinely deserve our gratitude.<sup>29</sup> This character trait is the virtue of gratitude, and it is the disposition to perceive and recognize benevolence from a benefactor and to respond to this benevolence by developing the properly grateful affective and behavioural tendencies vis-à-vis that benefactor.

There are two ways this conception of the virtue of gratitude can be marshalled to make the case that we ought to be grateful to nature. According to the first, one reason we ought to be grateful to nature is the same sort of reason that we ought to be viscerally averse to mutilating lifelike dolls or causing the brutal deaths of humanoid characters in lifelike videogames. It is not that there is anything intrinsically wrong with either of those acts; but people who do them without batting an eye may thereby reveal a worrisome deficiency in their disposition to avoid doing them to actual people. This might be either a deficiency in their ability to recognize situations in which anti-cruelty behaviour is called for or a deficiency in the anti-cruelty tendencies they form in response to the appearance of such situations. By the same token, a person who feels no gratitude toward a humanoid robot that brings him a drink or a lifelike video game character that helps him advance in the game might thereby evince a worrisome lack of sensitivity to evidence of benevolence or a worrisome failure to develop the inclinations to feel and act gratefully upon the recognition of such evidence. These are both essential aspects of the virtue of gratitude, a disposition that we must have if we are to reliably treat with gratitude everyone and everything that genuinely deserves it. Insofar as we ought to have this disposition, and insofar as failure to be grateful to nature indicates an absence of or deficiency in such a disposition, we ought to be grateful to nature.

---

<sup>29</sup> Hill (1983). Other philosophers who have endorsed a similar view include McAleer (2004).



Alternatively, it might be the case that we ought to be grateful to nature because insofar as we are not, we undermine a character trait that is essential to treating properly the people and things that genuinely deserve our gratitude. On this view, we ought to be grateful to nature for the same sort of reason that Kant thought we ought to be grateful and kind to certain nonhuman animals.<sup>30</sup> Kant believed that even though I do not violate a perfect obligation in, say, mistreating or neglecting a faithful dog, and even though I do not owe it to the animal itself to refrain from doing so, it is still bad for me to mistreat or neglect such an animal insofar as I thereby deaden in myself a certain sensitivity and a certain disposition to treat fellow humans gratefully and uncruelly, and those things I am obligated to do. By the same token, if I fail to be grateful to a humanoid robot or a lifelike video game character when they benefit me, I might be undermining in myself the sorts of inclinations that constitute the virtue of gratitude, which we ought to have if only for the sake of reliably treating properly those who are genuinely appropriate objects of gratitude; and so, even though such entities are not in themselves appropriate objects of gratitude, it may still be the case that I ought to be grateful to them.

Either of these possibilities, if true, might give us reason to believe that we ought to be grateful to nature even if nature is not, strictly speaking, an appropriate object of our gratitude. Ultimately, however, neither possibility seems very plausible, since nature is so much less humanoid than a lifelike doll or a humanoid robot or character in a realistic videogame. Nature may indeed benefit us, and it may indeed suffer at our hands, but the ways in which nature does these things are very different from the ways in which appropriate objects of gratitude (typically benevolent human benefactors) do. The experience of being benefited by nature will thus be very different from the experience of being benefited by a benevolent benefactor (or something that gives the impression of being a benevolent benefactor). The differences will be so great, in fact,

---

<sup>30</sup> Kant (1979: 212).

that we would not expect a grateful person's sensitivity to evidence of benevolence and benefactor-suffering to get triggered by nature, the way we would expect the sensitivities of such agents to be triggered by the behaviours of certain humanoid but non-gratitude-deserving entities. If this is the case, then a person who feels no gratitude after being benefited by nature does not thereby evince any lack of a grateful disposition. Nor does such a person necessarily undermine a grateful disposition by habituating himself to overlook evidence of benevolence or benefactor-suffering, since nature does not present sufficient evidence of benevolence or suffer in any way that resembles the suffering of any genuinely gratitude-deserving benefactor.

Still, even if nature does not present enough evidence to evoke a grateful response in those with the virtue of gratitude, it might be suggested that there is something natural about anthropomorphizing nature and attributing to it, despite lack of sufficient evidence, the intention to benefit us. It might be suggested, further, that we ought to embrace any natural tendency that we have to do so.<sup>31</sup> At the very least, doing so would give us one more object to whom to practice being grateful. It might also enhance our psychological wellbeing, insofar as being grateful is thought to consist, in part, of a positive or agreeable feeling, and the more things we have to be grateful to, the more we get to experience that feeling.<sup>32</sup>

There are three problems with this line of reasoning. The first is that grateful feelings are not invariably positive, and may sometimes be quite negative and painful.<sup>33</sup> This is because to be grateful to something is, in part, to care about it, and to care about something is to be disposed not only to be pleased when things go well for it, but also to be upset when things go poorly for

---

<sup>31</sup> This possibility is raised by Bardsley (2013: 38 fn 29). It is argued for more emphatically by Boleyn-Fitzgerald (2016).

<sup>32</sup> Those who suggest or make the claim that gratitude is or entails a positive feeling include Seneca (2010), Camenisch (1981), Card (1988), Fitzgerald (1998), Bruton (2003), Ceaser (2011), Gulliford, et al. (2013), and Boleyn-Fitzgerald (2016).

<sup>33</sup> Manela (2016b).

it. To be grateful to nature is, in part, to be upset or saddened when nature suffers, and anyone who believes we ought to be grateful to nature will also likely believe that nature suffers constantly and on a massive scale. Gratitude to nature, then, may be quite antithetical to psychological wellbeing. This does not necessarily mean we should avoid being grateful to anyone or anything that might suffer; but it does give us reason not to be nonchalant in deciding whom or what to be grateful to, insofar as we can decide such things for the sake of our own mental wellbeing.

A second concern about anthropomorphizing nature is that insofar as we allow ourselves to attribute human attitudes to nature when it comes to the good things nature does, we may find ourselves more and more inclined to attribute intentions to nature when it dishes out unpleasant things as well. For example, if I allow myself to see nature's benefits to me as having been intentionally bestowed, then I may well find myself resenting nature whenever nature harms me in some way. Worse still, when I hear of benefits nature has provided others, I might find myself getting jealous; and when I learn of natural catastrophes that have befallen others but not me, I might find myself inclined to think nature had a good reason to harm those it did.<sup>34</sup> One might think that we could simply regulate when and how we anthropomorphize nature, making sure we only ever do so when nature benefits us. But this precision in self-regulation seems unrealistic, and even if it were possible, it too might well be morally problematic. It could, for example, leave us with the arrogant and narcissistic impression that nature adores us, unambivalently cares about us, thinks us special enough to benefit. Indeed, this feature of gratitude—that it implies the beneficiary finds it plausible that the benefactor thought him worth benefiting—is one of the features that would render Yorick's gratitude to Renee and Roberta so offensive.

---

<sup>34</sup>This last possibility would explain why the more people anthropomorphize nature, the less willing they are to provide help to the victims of natural disasters. See Sacchi, et al. (2013: 273).

The third concern we should have with anthropomorphizing nature freely is that doing so may undermine an important component of the virtue of gratitude. Gratitude is a kind of social virtue that is partly constituted by a disposition to accurately discern the intentions of others. Without this disposition, a person cannot accurately tell when a benefactor is being beneficent in a way that warrants gratitude, and thus cannot accurately tell when grateful treatment (the feelings and behaviours that make up a grateful response to benevolence) is in fact due. A person who allows himself to anthropomorphize and intentionalize nature may come to see intentions that are not really there, even when he is dealing with other human beings.<sup>35</sup> He may thus come to feel gratitude too often, and may wind up feeling and behaving gratefully toward people who lack the intentions that genuinely warrant gratitude. At the extreme, this may take the form of grateful feelings and behaviours toward people who deserve indignation and resentment rather than gratitude—say, abusive teachers, friends or spouses. Undeserved gratitude in contexts like this—what we might call *overgratitude*—can amount to a pathological lack of self-respect, something like the vice of servility.<sup>36</sup> The only way to avoid drifting away from the mean of a grateful disposition toward a vice like overgrateful servility is to cultivate and protect our disposition to accurately discern intentions. This we fail to do when we give free rein to any tendency, however natural, to anthropomorphize and intentionalize non-agent entities like nature. Rather than preserving or reinforcing virtuous dispositions like gratitude, then, being grateful to nature actually jeopardizes and undermines such dispositions.

---

<sup>35</sup> This is especially clear in the case of virtues like the disposition to experience resentment at the right times, in response to the right things, to the right degree. A person who anthropomorphizes nature and attributes intentions to it that it does not have may come to feel resentful of nature whenever nature causes him harm, and may eventually come to resent *anything* that causes him harm, regardless of what evidence of intention it presents. Such a person may thus wind up feeling resentment far too often—resenting children, pets and household appliances that cause him harm but are not to blame for doing so.

<sup>36</sup> For an argument for this claim, see Manela (2015).

#### IV. Implications for Gratitude

In the preceding sections of this article, I argued against the claim that we ought to be grateful to nature. I first considered and rejected the possibility that nature might be an appropriate or fitting object of gratitude. I rejected this possibility on the grounds that gratitude is properly a response only to intentional benefitting from a benefactor, and nature is incapable of intentional action. I considered and rejected Bardsley's Thesis—a strong recent argument against the standard view that intentionality is necessary for gratitude to be appropriate. I then considered and rejected the possibility that we ought to be grateful to nature because gratitude to nature indicates or enhances or preserves a character trait that is morally good for us to have. I concluded with several reasons why we should resist the tendency to anthropomorphize nature that goes hand in hand with trying to be grateful to it.

Several of the arguments I have put forward have implications beyond the question of gratitude to ecosystems or to nature generally. My arguments against Thomas Hill's position, for example, also cast doubt on the claim that we ought to be grateful to inanimate objects or to non-agent organisms. I noted earlier that gratitude is a special kind of social virtue, one that is partly constituted by a disposition to accurately discern the intentions of others. When we allow ourselves to anthropomorphize nature, I argued, we erode this disposition and thereby undermine the virtue of gratitude in ourselves as well. But the same thing can happen when we try or allow ourselves to feel grateful toward objects like an old but reliable car, a body part of which we are especially fond,<sup>37</sup> or even natural objects like rocks, rivers and trees. When we tell a child, for example, to be grateful to an apple tree for the apples it gives him, we subtly encourage him to overlook the fact that the tree shows no evidence that it cares about him or wants to benefit him,

---

<sup>37</sup> Both these examples come from Boleyn-Fitzgerald (2016).

and learning to recognize just that kind of evidence (and its absence) is a fundamental part of what we should teach children as we help them develop into properly grateful people.

Furthermore, a child who is told to be grateful to apple trees for giving him their apples may very well wind up developing the problematically arrogant belief that he is more special than he is—or, at least, more special to apple trees than he really is. Believing such things seems inconsistent with environmental virtues like humility, insofar as that virtue is partly constituted by knowing one's place in nature.<sup>38</sup>

I must note here that although I have argued that there is no place in environmental ethics for gratitude to ecosystems, to nature as a whole, or to inanimate objects within ecosystems, there may still be a place for the virtue of gratitude in environmental ethics broadly construed. After all, nature is made up of other entities, and it may occasionally be appropriate for us to be grateful to some of them. It seems plausible, for instance, that certain non-domesticated nonhuman animals are capable of the sorts of intentional action that human beings are, and that some of those animals might sometimes benefit human beings intentionally, under the description 'helping humans.' A dolphin that lifts a drowning human to the surface of the ocean, for example, might plausibly be said to deserve gratitude for the rescue. The same might even be said for groups of animals. A pod of dolphins, for instance, that forms a protective circle around a human swimmer just the way it does for young dolphins when a shark is nearby seems to be intentionally protecting the swimmer from the shark. Even if these or other natural entities lack the capacity to form the genuine intentions necessary for gratitude to be fitting or appropriate, their behaviour may still be similar enough in appearance to the intentional benevolence of human individual or collective agents to make Hill's arguments about gratitude to nature

---

<sup>38</sup> Hill (1983: §3). Being grateful *for* inanimate objects, however, may very well be an important part of humility vis-à-vis nature.

relevant. The claim that we ought to be grateful to certain natural entities thus strikes me as promising. Putting forward a sound argument for that conclusion, however, would require a specification of the kind of intention that is necessary on the part of the benefactor for her or it to come to be a fitting object of gratitude, as well as evidence for the claim that certain animals and/or groups of animals are capable of forming that kind of intention regarding the wellbeing of human beings. While such a project is outside the scope of this article, I believe my analysis of gratitude to nature provides a helpful framework for it.

## V. Implications for Other Environmental Virtues

My arguments have implications for environmental virtues beyond gratitude, both as such virtues might concern nature as a whole and as they might concern individual organisms within it. Many social virtues, after all, are like gratitude in that they are partly constituted by a disposition to accurately discern the intentions of others. Such virtues might include forgiveness, contrition, mercy, justice, loyalty, friendship, goodwill, and love. Some philosophers have been tempted to suggest that we extend the domain of certain of these virtues to include as their objects things in the natural world, perhaps even whole ecosystems and nature generally. Several such philosophers argue for this extensionist claim by trying to demonstrate that the natural objects in question have interests, or at least the semblance of interests, that can be advanced in accordance with such virtues. Matt Ferkany, for example, has developed an account of mercy as intentionally treating another entity less harshly than one is entitled, by certain social rules, to treat that entity.<sup>39</sup> On this definition, Ferkany notes, whether or not natural objects can be proper objects of mercy depends on whether they have interests and whether relevant social rules give

---

<sup>39</sup> Ferkany (2011: 270).

certain agents a chance to treat nature or natural objects less harshly.<sup>40</sup> He then argues that both these conditions are met, at least in the case of certain natural objects or organisms. In a similar vein, Christopher Freiman has recently argued that goodwill is a virtue that can be cultivated toward nature. Freiman understands goodwill in the Aristotelian sense of wishing another well for the other's own sake, without requiring reciprocation.<sup>41</sup> According to Freiman, nature has a good of its own, and so we can (and should) wish it well for its own sake.

Both Ferkany's and Freiman's arguments seem largely plausible, at least insofar as they attend to the interests of natural objects as would-be objects of mercy and goodwill, respectively. But their accounts of those virtues fail to adequately consider the attitudes and intentions of the would-be object of mercy and goodwill, and recognizing these attitudes and intentions is an important part of what it means to be a properly merciful and goodwill-bearing person. Consider first mercy. To be a properly merciful person, one needs to strike a mean between the vice of ruthlessness, on the one hand, and the vice of softheartedness, on the other. The properly merciful agent will take many factors into account in determining the right amount of harshness to expose someone or something to, and one of those factors, it seems to me, will be the attitudes and intentions of the relevant second party. A party who harms me and shows no remorse or concern about my suffering, for instance, deserves more harshness than a person who harms me and then shows remorse and a commitment never to repeat the behaviour; and someone who shows the former party as much harshness as the latter is likely guilty of ruthlessness, softheartedness, or an incoherent mixture of the two. A merciful agent, then, will look for evidence of and take into account the attitudes and intentions of the party to whom he is considering being harsh. Most natural objects, however, give us no reason to believe they

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Freiman (2009).



possess any such intentions. When we are urged nonetheless to try to see such objects as proper objects of mercy, not only does that fail to facilitate the development of proper mercifulness toward other humans, but it may also very well erode that virtue in the contexts where it actually should apply, insofar as trying to be merciful to things without intention erodes our sensitivity to the intentions of others, and this sensitivity is necessary for being a properly merciful person.

Consider next goodwill. Goodwill itself, the way Freiman and Aristotle conceive of it, is not technically a virtue (understood as a relatively stable character trait a person can possess), but an attitude one can have toward someone or something outside oneself. The virtue associated with this attitude would be the disposition to form attitudes of goodwill at the right times, to the right parties, to the proper degree, with the proper duration. Among the factors that a person with this virtue should take into account are the attitudes and intentions of the would-be object of goodwill. This is what explains why a virtuous person will manifest different levels of goodwill toward a vicious, dishonest athlete who cheats, on the one hand, and a hardworking athlete with good sportsmanship who never cheats, on the other. Being able to make these distinctions is a crucial part of what it is to be a properly goodwill-bearing person, and we threaten to erode this ability when we urge people to unreflectively maximize goodwill toward anything that has the semblance of interests.

One thing environmental virtue ethicists should take away from my arguments, then, is a reluctance to argue that we should cultivate vis-à-vis nature the class of social virtues partly constituted by a disposition to discern the intentions of others, at least so long as we lack reason to believe that nature and creatures within it are capable of the sort of agency necessary to warrant attitudes like gratitude, goodwill and mercy. The fact that certain natural objects have or appear to have interests may be sufficient to show that they are proper objects of virtues like

*compassion* (a virtuous disposition to avert or minimize suffering), and it may be necessary for them to be proper objects of social virtues like the virtues of gratitude, goodwill and mercy. But these latter social virtues are appropriate only when their objects have intentions (or similar attitudes) as well as interests, and since nature and many natural objects give us no evidence they are capable of forming intentions (or similar attitudes), we should be reluctant to urge people to try to develop such dispositions toward nature; for when we do, we meld them into the sorts of people who stop looking for such evidence—the sorts of people who are too undiscerning to be properly and unambiguously ascribed the virtues of gratitude, goodwill and mercy, among others.<sup>42</sup>

My conclusion here should not be taken too far. Just because it is not the case that we ought to be grateful or merciful to nature or many of the objects within it doesn't mean we should be indifferent to these things. Indeed, as I suggested earlier, it seems very plausible that we ought to appreciate nature, and perhaps even praise it—just as Yorick ought to appreciate the benefit of having escaped a lifetime in prison and praise the qualities of Roberta and Renee that led him to escape such a fate. And even though appreciation and praise together do not amount to gratitude (as the scenarios with Yorick show), praise and appreciation should still drive us to protect nature, to care for it, and treat it well.<sup>43</sup> This is especially true when we combine praise and appreciation with other virtues, like compassion, which can be appropriate or fitting toward even those objects that have no intentions to benefit us.

---

<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, even though a person who takes natural objects as proper objects of mercy or gratitude may thereby fail to be a fully merciful or grateful person, he might still deserve to be ascribed the virtue of *compassion*, insofar as he rightly attends to the object's interests, recognizes evidence of the object's suffering and is properly averse to that suffering.

<sup>43</sup> Several philosophers would endorse this claim, though some of them use a definition of 'gratitude' I take to be synonymous with appreciation. See, for instance, Loder (2011). Cf. Swanton (1995).

Still, even if the motivational effects are the same, it makes an important difference whether we think of nature as a proper object of appreciation, praise and compassion rather than as a proper object of gratitude. If it were the case that we ought to be grateful to nature, then someone who mistreated nature would be *ungrateful*—and ingratitude is rightly thought of as one of the basest moral vices. An ingrate is someone who betrays the goodwill of his benefactor by stabbing her in the back or neglecting her when she is in distress; someone who does not take his commitments (e.g., to the wellbeing of his benefactors) seriously; someone incapable of being relied upon; someone we would not want to befriend. Litterbugs, polluters, poachers, energy over-consumers and resource-wasters may well fall short of virtue in various ways. They may be unappreciative, greedy, arrogant, immoderate, callous and insensitive. But we do them an injustice if we label them ingrates, and we should resist the urge to do so.

#### Acknowledgments

I am grateful to an audience at Radford University, to students in my 2016 and 2017 environmental ethics courses at Georgetown University, and to this journal's reviewers and editors for their thoughtful comments on earlier versions of this article.

References:

- Altshuler, Roman. 2014. 'The Value of Nonhuman Nature: A Constitutive View'. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* **17**: 469 - 485.
- Andrews, John. 1998. 'Weak Panpsychism and Environmental Ethics'. *Environmental Values* **7**: 381-396.
- Bardsley, Karen. 2013. 'Mother Nature and the Mother of All Virtues: On the Rationality of Feeling Gratitude toward Nature'. *Environmental Ethics* **35**: 27 - 40.
- Berger, Fred. 1975. 'Gratitude'. *Ethics* **85**: 298-309.
- Boleyn-Fitzgerald, Patrick. 2016. 'Gratitude Toward Things'. In David Carr (ed.), *Perspectives on Gratitude: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. New York: Routledge.
- Bruton, Samuel. 2003. 'Duties of Gratitude'. *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* **10**: 1-5.
- Cafaro, Philip. 2005. 'Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed, and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice'. In Ronald Sandler and Philip Cafaro (eds), *Environmental Virtue Ethics*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Cahen, Harley. 1988. 'Against the Moral Considerability of Ecosystems'. *Environmental Ethics* **10**: 195 - 216.
- Camenisch, Paul F. 1981. 'Gift and Gratitude in Ethics'. *The Journal of Religious Ethics* **9**: 1-34.
- Card, Claudia. 1988. 'Gratitude and Obligation'. *American Philosophical Quarterly* **25**: 115-127.
- Card, Claudia. 2004. 'Environmental Atrocities and Non-Sentient Life'. *Ethics and the Environment* **9**: 23 - 45.
- Ceaser, James. 2011. 'On Gratitude'. In *Endangered Virtues Essays*, edited by Peter Berkowitz.
- Chapman, Robert L. 2002. 'The Goat-stag and the Sphinx: The Place of the Virtues in Environmental Ethics'. *Environmental Values* **11**: 129 - 144.
- Driscoll, Carlos A., Marilyn Menotti-Raymond, Alfred L. Roca, Karsten Hupe, Warren E. Johnson, Eli Geffen, Eric H. Harley, Miguel Delibes, Dominique Pontier, Andrew C. Kitchener, Nobuyuki Yamaguchi, Stephen J. O'Brien and David W. Macdonald. 2007. 'The Near Eastern Origin of Cat Domestication'. *Science* **317**: 519-523.
- Ferkany, Matt. 2011. 'Mercy as an Environmental Virtue'. *Environmental Values* **20**: 265 - 283.
- Fitzgerald, Patrick. 1998. 'Gratitude and Justice'. *Ethics* **109**: 119-153.
- Freiman, Christopher. 2009. 'Goodwill Toward Nature'. *Environmental Values* **18**: 343 - 359.
- Gulliford, Liz, Blaire Morgan and Kristján Kristjánsson. 2013. 'Recent Work on the Concept of Gratitude in Philosophy and Psychology'. *Journal of Value Inquiry* **47**: 285 - 317.
- Hill, Thomas. 1983. 'Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments'. *Environmental Ethics* **5**: 211 - 224.
- Hursthouse, Rosalind. 2007. 'Environmental Virtue Ethics'. In *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, pp.155 - 171.
- Johnson, Lawrence. 1991. 'Eco-Interests'. In *A Morally Deep World: An Essay on Moral Significance and Environmental Ethics*, pp.202 - 229. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1979. *Lectures on Ethics*. Translated by Louis Infield. Cambridge: Hackett.
- Loder, Reed Elizabeth. 2011. 'Gratitude and the Environment: Toward Individual and Collective Ecological Virtue'. *The Journal of Jurisprudence*: 383 - 436.

- Manela, Tony. 2015. 'Obligations of Gratitude and Correlative Rights'. In Mark Timmons (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, pp.151 - 170.
- Manela, Tony. 2016a. 'Gratitude and Appreciation'. *American Philosophical Quarterly*.
- Manela, Tony. 2016b. 'Negative Feelings of Gratitude'. *Journal of Value Inquiry* **50**: 129 - 140.
- McAleer, Sean. 2004. 'The Treasure of the Sierra Madre'. *Film and Philosophy* **8**: 30 - 41.
- McAleer, Sean. 2012. 'Propositional Gratitude'. *American Philosophical Quarterly* **49**: 55 - 66.
- Plumwood, Val. 1998. 'Intentional Recognition and Reductive Rationality: A Response to John Andrews'. *Environmental Values* **7**: 397 - 421.
- Plumwood, Val. 2001. 'Nature as Agency and the Prospects for a Progressive Naturalism'. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* **12**: 3 - 32.
- Sacchi, Simona, Paolo Riva and Marco Brambilla. 2013. 'When Mother Earth Rises Up: Anthropomorphizing Nature Reduces Support for Natural Disaster Victims'. *Social Psychology* **44**: 271-277. doi: 10.1027/1864-9335/a000112.
- Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. 2010. *On Benefits*. Translated by Miriam Griffin and Brad Inwood. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Simmons, A. John. 1979. *Moral Principles and Political Obligations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Swanton, Christine. 1995. 'Profiles of the Virtues'. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*: 47 - 72.
- Taliaferro, Charles. 2005. 'Vices and Virtues in Religious Environmental Ethics'. In Ronald Sandler and Philip Cafaro (eds), *Environmental Virtue Ethics*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Vogel, Steven. 2002. 'Environmental Philosophy after the End of Nature'. *Environmental Ethics* **24**: 23 - 39.
- Walker, A. D. M. 1980-1981. 'Gratefulness and Gratitude'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* **81**: 39-55.
- Weiss, Roslyn. 1985. 'The Moral and Social Dimensions of Gratitude'. *The Journal of Southern Philosophy* **XXIII**: 491-501.