

men—as that for example of a benefactor to a dependant, or of one who has conferred a kindness to another who has received it. There is a moral or ethical propriety that springs out of this relation. It is that of gratitude from the latter of these individuals to the former of them. Gratitude is the incumbent virtue in such a case, and a benefactor is the object of that virtue.

6. Now to make one feel the truth of the ethical principle, it matters not whether he has seen many or few benefactors in the course of his experience. Nay, it matters not whether there are many or few benefactors in the world. The moral propriety of gratitude is that which attaches to the relation between a benefactor and a dependant; and it equally remains so whether the relation be seldom or often exemplified. Nay, gratitude would be the appropriate virtue of this relation, although actually it were never exemplified at all. The ethical principle of the virtuousness of gratitude does not depend on the existent reality of an object for this virtue. Let a benefactor really exist; and then gratitude is due to him. Or let a benefactor only be supposed to exist; and then we affirm with as great readiness that gratitude would be due to him. The incumbent morality is alike recognised—whether we behold a real object, or only figure to ourselves a hypothetical one. The morality, in fact, does not depend for its rightness on any such contingency, as the actual and substantive existence of a proper object to which it may be rendered. The virtuousness of gratitude would remain a stable category in ethical science; although, never