Moral Appraisal of Emotions: The Combining of Smith and Roberts

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Though emotions are often morally appraised and judged in everyday life among individuals, within the moral responsibility community this comes in direct conflict with the commonly held belief that moral responsibility requires some form of volitional control. Angela Smith argues that volitional control is not a key factor in responsibility but depends upon an agent’s evaluative judgments. She specifically argues this in reference to a variety involuntary mental states, but thus far in Smith’s work, she hasn’t address how specifically emotions, one type of an involuntary attitude, is connected to evaluative judgments. In this paper, I will address this small gap in Angela Smith’s work by relying on Robert C. Roberts’ theory of emotions, with the ultimate goal of defending and strengthening Smith’s theory.

Here I Stand: Religious Conscience and Legal Exemptions

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On the one hand, religious objectors regularly enjoy special legal treatment in secular liberal societies, typically in the form of exemptions to laws of general applicability. On the other hand, their nonreligious counterparts rarely – if ever – enjoy the same sort of special legal treatment, oftentimes failing to qualify for the same legal exemptions. Is it morally permissible to grant special legal treatment to religious objectors only, or should we extend similar legal accommodations to nonreligious objectors as well? In this paper, I will argue that we should not treat religious conscientious objectors with any more or less legal privilege than nonreligious conscientious objectors. To establish this claim, I will begin by explaining why it is plausible to conceive of many – if not most – contemporary religious objections as uniquely religious conscientious objections. Once we have a working definition of the term ‘conscience’ and ‘conscientious objection’ in place, it will become clear why religious objections to, say, servicing same-sex weddings or participating in the HHS mandate can be understood as conscientious objections. From there, I will argue that there are no good moral reasons to treat religious conscience beliefs with comparatively special legal treatment on the grounds that there are no features of religious conscience beliefs that warrant such treatment. Once this claim is established, I will conclude by reflecting on a few resulting questions. Most importantly, I will recommend a rough, though not conclusive, answer to the question concerning just how we should treat either claim of conscience seeking an accommodation to some generally applicable law, granting that they should be treated equally.
Moral Responsibility and Implicit Biases

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Maibom (2014) argues that there is a conflict of intuition about moral responsibility that requires an expansion of this concept. Moral responsibility has close connections with having control over the action. However, according to Maibom, there are cases that the agent’s control is restricted or eliminated but we still intuitively find her responsible. Maibom provides some extreme cases of situational effects in which the agent’s judgment is unconsciously influenced by certain situations, so she does not have control over what causes her action, namely her judgment. In all these cases, however, we intuitively find the agent morally responsible. Maibom concludes that we need to expand our notion of moral responsibility in a way that is compatible with this intuition, and she suggests that perspective taking provides such capacity for this notion. In this paper, I argue that the examples that she provides do not show that there is a need for expansion of the notion of responsibility. The unconscious influences that causes the dilemma is not significant in extreme cases, while extreme cases are the only ones in which there is a clear intuition about the agent’s responsibility. Moreover, in the cases of unconscious influences perspective taking as a conscious introspection by itself cannot be helpful by definition. Finally, I argue that there are non-extreme cases of unconscious influence, like implicit biases, in which the agent is morally responsible, but responsibility is the consequence of her control over other elements that can detour the unconscious influence and she can control.

Using Transformational Leadership to Inspire Ethical Machiavellian Business Leaders

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Despite some progress with instilling ethics into business practice, businesses continue to make decisions that result in incredible harms to people and the environment around the world. Academics, the public, and the media have often singled out business leaders as unethical and responsible for the vast harms that their companies have done. As a result, some have looked to ethical business leadership as one avenue of approach to making businesses act more ethically. This paper explores two leadership styles. The first is Machiavellianism, which has a reputation for being one of the least ethical leadership styles. The second is transformational leadership, which has a reputation for being one of the most ethical leadership styles. This paper attempts to align components of transformational leadership with Machiavellianism so that Machiavellian leaders will have reason to behave more ethically. Ultimately, I conclude that there is nothing in transformational leadership theory that can inspire Machiavellian leaders to do so.
A Mongrelized Public: Groups Rights and Cosmopolitanism

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Two philosophers who have developed different conceptions of group rights are Jeremy Waldron and Iris Young. In his paper “Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative,” Waldron offers a critique of communitarianism and group preservation, followed by a proposal for a cosmopolitan society, where cultural frameworks are minimized to allow for a more hybridized individual. In her essay, “Together in Difference: Transforming the Logic of Group Political Conflict,” Young criticizes a certain liberal conception of an ‘assimilationist ideal’, offering instead an alternative ideal which recognizes groups and seeks to correct for social injustices resulting from group identity. In this essay I will critique Waldron’s cosmopolitan approach, as it stands on its own, and in light of Young’s thesis, to show that a more nuanced, fluid view of groups is required to honor group rights and to uphold adherence to democratic ideals. I will show that social justice and remediation of inequalities, both extensions of the democratic ideals, demand that groups’ rights be sufficiently upheld.

Caring for a Life Worth Living

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End-of-life care is an area where ethicists must weigh a patient’s rights and values against questions concerning the patient’s quality of life. This task can be especially difficult in situations where, given the patient’s current mental state, it is unclear what sorts of rights and quality of life the patient possesses. The goal of my paper is to present a distinction between a meaningful life and a life worth living in order to explore what sorts of rights do those living with dementia, and other forms of mental incapacitation, have or retain and what is the best way to care for - and show respect to - them and their interests.

Dealing with Moral Demand: Character, Psychology, and Lichtenberg’s Desiderata

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In this paper, I consider the claim that our moral responsibilities are highly demanding. As some have argued, we have to face up to the fact that morality demands what it demands, even when this demand requires great sacrifice on our part. Objecting to this, Judith Lichtenberg has recently argued that “If alleviating the suffering of others generally requires very significant sacrifice, that is a reason for thinking that people are not morally obligated to do so” (Lichtenberg, 2014). Call this Lichtenberg’s Principle (LP). I evaluate this claim, arguing that Lichtenberg’s main argument for LP faces serious problems. Next, I consider some of Lichtenberg’s proposed strategies for promoting greater humanitarian action. These strategies tend to focus on psychological techniques that are effective in “nudging” people to (i) contribute more towards the alleviation of suffering while, at the same time, (ii) reducing the burden of giving. Call (i)-(ii), Lichtenberg’s Desiderata. One might
wonder whether a moral procedure should achieve good ends like (i)-(ii) to the neglect of moral character. Lichtenberg responds to this by arguing that, “in fact we care about both—human character and the alleviation of suffering—and so we can find ourselves in conflict. When these aims clash, I believe the alleviation of suffering should take priority” (2010, p. 138). Consequently, Lichtenberg says little about the relevance of character for her project. Drawing from recent work in psychology and moral psychology, I argue that character formation is relevant to the fulfillment of Lichtenberg’s desiderata. Cultivating good character can alleviate the burden of moral projects while promoting more robust moral lives, resulting in greater efforts to alleviate suffering. If we want people to make significant contributions to the alleviation of suffering while incurring few losses in the process, we ought to pursue strategies that focus on cultivating moral character, in addition to strategies that psychologically nudge people to give more.

Is Testimonial Injustice Inherently Wrong?

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According to Miranda Fricker, a “testimonial injustice” occurs when a hearer assigns a credibility deficit to a speaker due to an identity-prejudicial stereotype. Why is testimonial injustice morally bad? What, exactly, is unjust about this kind of credibility assignment? Is the wrong of testimonial injustice fundamentally epistemic? Is the wrongness inherent or merely downstream? Fricker argues that testimonial injustices are inherently wrong, and that the inherent wrongness is distinctively epistemic. In the positive part of my paper, I agree with Fricker that testimonial injustice is inherently wrong, though I argue for an alternative explanation of this fact. Instead of relying on the concept of dehumanization via epistemic exclusion, we should instead conceive of the wrong of testimonial injustice as a prejudicially unmeritocratic award of welfare goods. In particular, the welfare good in question is that of being highly esteemed by others. In the negative part of my paper, I argue that Fricker’s account of the wrong of testimonial injustice misses the mark.