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# The Moralistic Fallacy: On the 'Appropriateness' of Emotions\*

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Philosophers often call emotions appropriate or inappropriate. What is meant by such talk? In one sense, explicated in this paper, to call an emotion appropriate is to say that the emotion is *fitting*: it accurately presents its object as having certain evaluative features. For instance, envy might be thought appropriate when one's rival has something good which one lacks. But someone might grant that a circumstance has these features, yet deny that envy is appropriate, on the grounds that it is wrong to be envious. These two senses of 'appropriate' have much less in common than philosophers have supposed. Indeed, the distinction between propriety and correctness is crucial to understanding the distinctive role of the emotions in ethics. We argue here that an emotion can be fitting despite being wrong to feel, and that various philosophical arguments are guilty of a systematic error which we term the moralistic fallacy.

There has been much philosophical discussion of the emotions lately, particularly of their rationality and their moral significance. These are important issues, but we think this discussion is in some crucial respects undeveloped, obscure, or confused. An intimate connection between ethics and the emotions has been neglected, concerning a class of evaluative properties that essentially involve emotional responses—properties such as shameful, funny, fearsome, and enviable. Moreover, we contend that a systematic error pervades the contemporary literature on this subject, which issues from the tendency to exaggerate the role of narrowly moral reasons in broadly evaluative thought.

Philosophers tend to query the rationality and moral significance of emotions by posing ambiguous questions about their justification. The trouble is that there are various kinds of justification or endorsement which can be made of an episode of emotion; for instance, one can judge that a feel-

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ing is expedient, that it is morally permissible, or that it is “what to feel” all things considered. But a different question is crucial for the ascription of these response-dependent emotional properties.<sup>1</sup> This is the question of correctness: whether the emotion fits its object, in a sense which we will presently seek to explicate. Thus, there is a crucial distinction between the question of whether some emotion is the right way to feel, and whether that feeling gets it right.

It is remarkable how often philosophers conflate these questions. Even when they fix on the pertinent question, many are prone to bring extraneous considerations, especially moral ones, too broadly to bear upon it. We will argue that moral and prudential considerations about an emotion (such as what kind of person you would be to be amused by a morally dubious joke) are irrelevant to the issue at hand. The only relevant considerations are those reasons that speak to whether an emotion correctly represents its object (whether the joke is funny). Of course, our opponents will insist that considerations about the propriety of feeling an emotion can properly be brought to bear on the ascription of these properties. (The wrongness of being amused by a joke counts against the claim that the joke is funny.) That is the dispute.

Such talk of emotional correctness or fittingness raises a long-standing problem about the nature of emotions: namely, whether they are or entail judgments, beliefs, or evaluations. Although this question is still debated, there has been some notable convergence. Most recent accounts of the structure of emotion, despite their differences, agree that emotions (somehow) present the world to us as having certain value-laden features.<sup>2</sup> Following their lead, we will say that emotions involve *evaluative presentations*: they purport to be perceptions of such properties as the funny, the shameful, the fearsome, the pitiable, et al. Envy, for instance, involves a complex set of evaluations in presenting its object as enviable. Very roughly, one’s envy portrays a rival as having a desirable possession that one lacks, and it casts this circumstance in a specific negative light. This is, obviously, a nebulous gloss of envy’s evaluative presentation, especially since ‘possession’ must be taken metaphorically, so as to include a wide range of what might instead be called successes.<sup>3</sup> But this vagueness is not carelessness. We think that noth-

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<sup>1</sup> Talk of response-dependent properties is, for us, talk of properties that invoke specifically emotional responses. In this respect, our usage differs from some of the literature, which includes a broader range of responses. See, e.g., Johnston 1989.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., de Sousa (1987), Greenspan (1988), Roberts (1988), Solomon (1976).

<sup>3</sup> It is sometimes claimed that emotions are “culturally constructed.” This might mean several different things, some of which we can embrace. While we are committed to there being a set of basic human emotions, many other emotion-like states can be constructed from them, most typically through the addition of more determinate cognitive content. Furthermore, even basic emotions get attached to different kinds of objects

ing better than a rough-and-ready gloss of an emotion's evaluative presentation can be provided, even in principle; and that this is why such properties are inevitably response-dependent; but we won't attempt to argue for this claim here. Still, we can (and presently will) do more to specify the particular negative light—the kind of pain or bother—involved in bouts of envy.

Although we hold that emotions involve evaluative presentations, we want to deny that they constitute judgments, while attempting to capture what is right about judgmentalism. Emotions are indeed intimately related to certain sorts of evaluative judgment, but one can have an emotion without making the associated judgment. Although it is possible to be afraid of something without judging it fearsome, or to judge it fearsome without actually fearing it, these are uncommon and unstable combinations. (Similarly for analogous dissonance between other emotions and their corresponding judgments.) Such conditions put psychological and rational—that is, causal and normative—pressure on us to alter our feelings or our judgments in order to bring them into harmony. Since the term 'judgment' typically refers to critically endorsed thoughts, however, it is misleading to say that emotions constitute judgments. A bout of shame presents its object (typically some feature of the agent) as shameful; but to be ashamed is not necessarily to endorse this presentation in any way, much less in the particular manner which entails judging that this feature is genuinely shameful.<sup>4</sup> But, in addition to this quasi-judgmental aspect of the emotions, they have another aspect that is best illustrated by an admittedly imperfect analogy with perception.<sup>5</sup> The unstable position of feeling an emotion while resisting its evaluative presentation is like being aware of perceiving an optical illusion. The famous Müller-Lyer lines continue to appear unequal in length, despite our knowledge to the contrary; similarly, anger that is acknowledged to be groundless continues to make an evaluative presentation.

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across cultures; thus it will be more apt to gloss envy's evaluative presentation in terms of possession for materialist cultures such as ours.

<sup>4</sup> We are thus siding, terminologically, with Greenspan, Roberts, and de Sousa against Solomon, who identifies himself as a judgmentalist. We suspect, however, that this debate is more terminological than is commonly recognized, since Solomon's notion of a judgment seems rather different from that sketched above. At any rate, we take our claim that emotions involve evaluative presentations to be compatible with all these accounts, as it has been influenced by them. Where we say "fear presents the dog as fearsome," de Sousa might speak of a perception of its fearsomeness, Greenspan of "feeling as if the dog will harm you," and Roberts of making a "concern-based construal" of the dog as a possible or likely source of harm. Solomon might say our fear is a "hasty and dogmatic judgment" that it is fearsome.

<sup>5</sup> The most significant disanalogies with perception are the lack of dedicated emotional organs, and the fact that one need not be in the presence of the object of one's occurrent emotions. Note that these are also the most telling complaints against perceptual metaphors in ethics.

The class of things called emotions is notoriously diverse, and we do not aspire to say anything novel here about what emotions are. Instead, we will adopt two principles which are widely accepted in the literature. First, we will be focusing on occurrent mental states—bouts of emotion rather than standing traits or dispositions. We will talk primarily about people getting angry, that is, rather than about angry people. Second, we are concerned with object-directed attitudes rather than with feelings or moods, which need not be understood as presenting the world in any particular way. Specifically, our discussion is intended to apply to such states as amusement, anger, contempt, disgust, envy, fear, grief, guilt, hope, jealousy, joy, lust, pity, pride, regret, and shame—or, rather, to instances of these emotions that respect the above qualifications. We think this list constitutes a plausible core group, which includes the states commonly called “basic emotions” and claimed to have cross-cultural analogues.<sup>6</sup>

The most distinctive and important connection between ethics and the emotions, we will suggest, arises from the quasi-judgmental, quasi-perceptual character of emotional experience. There are other important connections as well, of course, such as the role emotions play in motivating action, for better or worse; and how a person’s emotional dispositions are relevant to the assessment of his character and action.<sup>7</sup> But these questions are quite similar to other assessments of action, character, and motivation that have nothing to do with the emotions. In this paper, we will be concerned with what we take to be the more distinctive role of the emotions in ethics. We argue, first, that commonplace practices of property ascription presuppose that we can make sense of the *fittingness* of certain emotional responses: a relation analogous to that between a true belief and the world. Then we will argue that moral considerations about the propriety of having an emotional response are irrelevant to whether the associated evaluative property obtains. Hence, philosophers and others are guilty of a kind of fallacious reasoning in their inferences about the fittingness of emotion, which we term the “moralistic fallacy.” Put

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<sup>6</sup> See numerous books and articles by P. Ekman, C.E. Izard, and J. Panskepp. Ekman focuses primarily on facial studies, Izard on integrating neuromuscular and expressive aspects of emotion, and Panskepp on neurophysiology. Just what “basicness” amounts to is itself an enormously complicated question we won’t pursue here. Many of the relevant issues are canvassed in the contributions to Ekman and Davidson (1994). For an overview of psychological theories of emotion, see Strongman (1996). Griffiths (1997) claims there to be a fundamental antagonism between empirically-driven views and what he calls “propositional attitude” theories, but we see no deep conflict between the best scientific and the best philosophical accounts of the emotions.

<sup>7</sup> Thus, de Sousa notes that several of the deadly sins are also names of emotions (e.g. pride, envy, lust, and wrath); and that the cardinal virtues resemble dispositions to resist the emotions’ motivational pull. (See de Sousa 1987, esp. p. 17.) Like de Sousa and many others, we are skeptical of the traditional antagonism between morality and the emotions, but we will ultimately suggest that the idea of a fundamental conflict is not entirely mistaken.

most simply, to commit the moralistic fallacy is to infer, from the claim that it would be wrong or vicious to feel an emotion, that it is therefore unfitting. We shall contend, to the contrary, that an emotion can be fitting despite being wrong (or inexpedient) to feel. In fact, the wrongness of feeling an emotion never, in itself, constitutes a reason that the emotion fails to be fitting.<sup>8</sup>

### Fitting Emotions

People routinely talk about what is and isn't funny, shameful, enviable, disgusting, et al. And we sometimes allow that things are funny, despite our failing to muster the relevant emotional response; or that they aren't really funny, even though we find ourselves amused. The fact that we talk and think this way shows that it matters to us whether our feelings are properly tracking those properties of which they purport to be perceptions. We even go on to speak of *the funny* or *the shameful*, thereby treating these qualities as context-independent properties. But to use predicates in this fashion, and to think that our emotions may be correct or erroneous in the way they present things to us, is to be committed to a significant presupposition: that we can make sense of a specific sort of criticism of our emotions, which adduces only those considerations bearing on the accuracy of their evaluative presentations.<sup>9</sup> A central theme of this paper is that we must be able not simply to distinguish good from bad reasons to feel an emotion, in order to predicate these evaluative properties; we must also be able to distinguish good but irrelevant reasons to feel from those that can properly be brought to bear on property ascription. The fact that shame is an unpleasant feeling, for instance, or that it would be counterproductive to feel on some occasion, are perfectly good reasons not to be ashamed which are, nevertheless, irrelevant to whether what one has done is shameful. Were we unable to distinguish such good but irrelevant reasons not to feel an emotion from those that are relevant to property ascription, we would lose the right to talk property talk about the funny and the shameful.

In his paper, "Moral Valuation," Richard Brandt offered an analysis of this class of evaluative terms which he called "Y-able" words, where Y stands for some attitude or emotion: terms such as 'pitable', 'enviable', and

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to deny that a consideration might be both a reason why it's wrong to feel some way and a reason why the emotion doesn't fit; but even then, we will argue, its role as a moral reason will be adventitious to its role as a consideration of fit.

<sup>9</sup> This presupposition need not be understood as ontological or metaphysical; indeed, to take its metaphysical purport at face value would be to beg the question against noncognitive interpretations of the discourse. Sophisticated noncognitivist theories should allow us to talk and think this way, from the perspective of a participant in normative discourse, even while they offer an explanation of it, from the theoretical perspective, which posits a fundamental disanalogy between fittingness and truth. This follows the strategy exemplified by Gibbard (1990) and Blackburn (1993).

'regrettable'. In addition to those terms already present in our language, Brandt writes that "any name of an attitude or emotion combined with the phrases 'deserving of' or 'worthy of' would be a circumlocution having the same meaning" (1946, p. 111). He thus recognized the crucial point that these  $\Psi$ -able or  $\Phi$ -terms are not merely dispositional; rather, they carry the purport that some emotion is "properly, rightly, or fittingly directed at [its] object." Brandt's paper is prescient in its appreciation of the singular importance of this class of evaluative terms, whose connection to basic human responses secures a shared subject matter for dispute over their application, which is a prerequisite for genuine disagreement—or agreement. Moreover, his suggestion that our emotional responses can be assessed for their fittingness is the cornerstone of a metaethical program that has reinvigorated the sentimentalist tradition in ethics, which first flourished in the work of Hutcheson and Hume.

Recently, a disparate group of philosophers has followed Brandt in not simply identifying evaluative judgment with sentiments (attitudes or emotions); rather, they adopt a higher-order analysis on which to think that some  $\Phi$ -property obtains is, in some elusive sense, to *endorse* feeling its associated emotion  $F$ . This *neo-sentimentalist* program includes the sensibility theories of John McDowell and David Wiggins, as well as Allan Gibbard's norm expressivism, Simon Blackburn's quasi-realism, and Elizabeth Anderson's rational attitude theory.<sup>10</sup> While these philosophers differ both in their preferred normative locutions and, more substantially, in their metaethical stances, we think that their well-known dispute over cognitivism has obscured a deeper similarity.<sup>11</sup> On all these theories, to think that a trait is shameful, for instance, is to think shame an appropriate (merited or rational) response to it; likewise, for a joke to be funny is for amusement at it to be appropriate. However, the neo-sentimentalists have not yet sufficiently explored the role of the emotions in their project. Where the relevant issues have been broached, the metaethical literature—like the literature on the philosophy of emotion—is less than perspicuous. In particular, what kind of endorsement is involved in the judgment that an emotion is, on some occasion, an appropriate response? There is a real danger of confusion here, if these distinct senses of appropriateness and the reasons relevant to each are not adequately differentiated. The danger is that unearned credence be given to a moralism of the emotions, which conflates their propriety with their correctness.

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<sup>10</sup> See McDowell (1985, 1897), Wiggins (1987), Anderson (1993), Blackburn (1993), and Gibbard (1990). While McDowell in particular would probably balk at being called a sentimentalist, given his primary emphasis on reason, he too subscribes to the fundamental thesis of neo-sentimentalism as glossed in this paragraph.

<sup>11</sup> See D'Arms and Jacobson (2000) for further discussion of the neo-sentimentalist program and their efforts to "earn the talk of truth" for evaluative judgment.

The trouble with all extant sentimentalisms is that they have been insufficiently careful to differentiate several distinct questions which can be asked about a feeling, using the popular normative idioms.<sup>12</sup> One can ask a prudential question, whether it is good for you to feel F; or a moral question, whether it is right to feel F; or one can ask the all-in question of practical reason, whether F is what to feel, all things considered. But none of these questions is equivalent to the question of whether F is fitting in the sense relevant to whether its object X is  $\Phi$ .<sup>13</sup> In order to demonstrate that this question, the crucial one for evaluative judgment, is indeed logically distinct from the moral, prudential, and all-in practical questions, we merely need to show that some considerations which bear on those further questions are irrelevant to property ascription.

Consider a couple of brief examples. One reason it doesn't make sense to envy Susan, your newly tenured colleague, is that to do so might jeopardize your relations with her by fostering her resentment, and eventually you'll need her vote. (Imagine yourself, for the purposes of this example, to be untenured junior faculty.) This sounds like good, albeit rather calculated advice, but it seems to invoke a different kind of assessment of your envy than sentimentalism needs, since it does not speak to whether or not her promotion is enviable. The point is not simply that it's still possible for you to envy Susan, despite your reasons to the contrary. 'Enviably' here does not mean "able to be envied" but "fit to be envied," in just the elusive sense we are pursuing.<sup>14</sup> While this perfectly good prudential consideration counts as a reason not to feel envious of Susan, it does not bear on whether her tenure is enviable. Similarly, considerations about the likely consequences of being amused (including the possibility of expressing your amusement through laughter) can bear on prudential or moral questions about whether to be amused, without bearing on the fittingness of amusement. In circumstances where it would be rude or disastrous to laugh, one has a moral or prudential reason not to be amused—insofar as one can help it—*whether or not the joke is funny*. And if it would be both wrong and inexpedient to be amused (or if you take moral considerations to be overriding), then amusement is not what to feel, all things considered. Thus, some considerations that bear on the

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<sup>12</sup> An important exception is Gibbard, who does make some of these distinctions. We depart from him primarily in our concern to distinguish not only moral and prudential considerations, but also those of fittingness, from the broad practical question of what to feel.

<sup>13</sup> Emotions differ greatly in the kinds of object they take; we will use the term 'object' broadly, and distinguish between different kinds of object only when necessary. Many of the relevant distinctions are helpfully made in de Sousa (1987).

<sup>14</sup> In fact, the primary meaning of the term 'enviable' in ordinary language is nearly synonymous with 'desirable'. But this vagary of natural language is not to the point, since, as Brandt noted, we could coin a term to mean "fit to be envied," if 'enviable' didn't also have this meaning.



moral, prudential, and all-in questions are indeed irrelevant to whether the corresponding evaluative property obtains.

Emotions present things to us as having certain evaluative features. When we ask whether an emotion is fitting, in the sense relevant to whether its object is  $\Phi$ , we are asking about the correctness of these presentations. The relevant considerations, then, are just those that count as evidence for the evaluations an emotion presents to us. In this respect, the fittingness of an emotion is like the truth of a belief.<sup>15</sup> But, as Pascal's wager demonstrates (whether or not you accept his theistic conclusion), the evidence does not always settle what to believe. So there is a relatively circumscribed set of evidential considerations counting in favor of the claim that a belief is true or an emotion fitting, and these are members of a potentially much wider set of considerations bearing on the question of whether the attitude is *rational*: whether it is what to feel or believe, all things considered.

Talk of the fittingness of emotions may sound *recherché*, but 'fittingness' is simply intended as a technical term for a familiar type of evaluation. Endorsement and criticism of emotions on grounds of fit is a crucial tool of our ordinary thought about them, and of our folk psychology. For instance, the homily that "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence" warns against the common tendency to overrate the value of things we don't possess. We thus use this proverb to criticize ourselves and others for feeling envy (or mere longing) when the rival's possession isn't really enviable. While it may also be harmful or wrong to be envious, the homily's implicit evaluation is not of morality or prudence, but of fit: that grass isn't really as green as it looks to you, in the throes of envy. The "sour grapes" phenomenon also speaks to the fittingness of envy, but it warns against the opposite error: the tendency to downgrade the value of what we cannot have. (We will leave the problem of the inconsistency of folk wisdom for another day.) Both these homilies can be contrasted with the proverb "Don't cry over spilt milk," which invokes a different sort of criticism of sadness, since it is surely more fitting to cry over spilt than unspilt milk. Obviously, this is prudential advice: if the milk is already spilt, crying over it will do no good. Thus, some of our practices of criticism of the emotions speak to their fittingness and some do not. The crucial point is that we regularly give weight to considerations of fit, in deliberating about what to feel—not just about envy, but also shame and pride, guilt and anger, fear, jealousy, etc.

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<sup>15</sup> We will not here pursue the question of how the metaphysics of emotional fittingness is best understood—such as whether it answers to a realm of evaluative facts. Hence, our discussion is meant to be metaethically neutral, at least with respect to the debates over realism and cognitivism. If these arguments are sound, noncognitivists must be able to show that they can make a place for assessments of fit in their economy of normative attitudes. Our claims about the notion of fit are independent data which any adequate account of these other questions must respect, if our commonplace practices of property ascription are to be sustained.

Indeed, reflection on the fittingness of an emotion can be more effective in governing our actual feelings than is moral or prudential reflection. Prudential considerations, especially about fear or anxiety, are often counterproductive; and moral considerations can induce guilt without alleviating the offending emotion.

We suggest that considerations of fittingness can be divided into two kinds, corresponding to two dimensions of fit: one can criticize an emotion with regard to its *size* and its *shape*.<sup>16</sup> An emotional episode presents its object as having certain evaluative features; it is unfitting on grounds of shape when its object lacks those features. According to our rough-and-ready characterization, envy portrays a rival as having a desirable possession which you do not, and it presents this circumstance in a specific negative light. This suggests an oversimplified but useful schema for when envy's shape fails to fit the world: if the thing I envy isn't really possessed by my rival, or if it isn't really good—indeed, better than mine. Suppose you envy Susan the cabin in the woods where you believe she spends her weekends. Your envy would be unfitting on grounds of shape if the cabin is primitive and you're keen on comfort, or if she really has no cabin and spends the weekends caring for a sick relative.

One trouble with this simple schema is that there are two distinct evaluations in envy: roughly, that what the rival has is good, and that it is bad for you that she has it and you don't. It is envy's overarching negative assessment that is specific to its evaluative presentation, and distinguishes it from longing and admiration, both of which can involve thinking that someone else has something good which you lack. This aspect of envy's evaluative presentation can be contested as well. One can deny that there is anything to be pained by, in the manner peculiar to envy, while granting that what one's rival has is good. If Susan envied you some small but real professional accomplishment of yours, her envy might not fit the world. That depends on whether your achieving this good is bad for her—which, we think, it might

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<sup>16</sup> In order to speak of the fit between an emotion and its object, one must ascribe some kind of structure to the emotions, which can be compared with their objects and found accurate or wanting; but we will not attempt to arbitrate between various suggestions as to how this is to be done. Some philosophers locate this structure in a judgment, construal, or appearance which is part of what it is to have the emotion. Others argue that the structural features which allow us to reason about, and to endorse or criticize, an emotion derive instead from its functional role, which is characterized by appeal to patterns in the typical circumstances under which the emotion is experienced and in the actions to which it gives rise. See Kraut (1986, pp. 642–52) and Gibbard (1990, esp. Ch. 7). Still another possibility, suggested by de Sousa, is that there are constraints on our emotion concepts which derive from certain “paradigm scenarios” with which we acquire these concepts. The judgment that an emotion fits its object will rest, then, on its similarity to such paradigm scenarios. All that talk of the fittingness of emotions requires is that the emotions have sufficient structure to ground reflection on whether or not they fit their objects.

or might not be. In either case, certain tempting criticisms of such envy, such as that it would be petty of her to envy you this when she has so much more, do not speak to whether the circumstance is even slightly bad for her; hence they are irrelevant to whether her envy is fitting.

An emotion can also be criticized for its size. While such criticism typically implies that it has the right shape, one can nevertheless urge that an emotional response is unfitting because it is an overreaction.<sup>17</sup> Thus your envy might be too large for the circumstances, if what you have is almost as good as your rival's. Then you would not be warranted in being much pained over such a trifling difference. Notice, though, that it may be all the more galling that your neighbor had to go out and buy an ever-so-slightly better car than yours, especially if you suspect that this was his intent. (As it might well have been, were he motivated by envy!) But even if this is more galling, for the way it manifests his venal and competitive intentions, the car is no more enviable for that. Unless, of course—as we suspect is often the case—what is really at stake is less a matter of automotive supremacy than a battle for status on the block; for this competition one wins simply by outdoing the Joneses, by however slim a margin.

This discussion of the norms of fit surrounding envy is not meant to be comprehensive or unarguable; moreover, since each emotion has its own shape, these claims cannot be generalized. Our primary goal in explicating the shape of envy is less to land any specific claim about that emotion than to illustrate how such an investigation into fittingness must proceed. That is, ethics needs to engage substantively with the philosophy of emotion, in order to reveal our criteria for when these response-dependent evaluative properties obtain. While there are some fine examinations of particular emotions to be found in this literature, we also think that certain systematic errors plague philosophical explication of the shapes of emotion. Notice, for instance, that our rough gloss of envy says nothing about desert; and we will presently argue that the question of whether Susan deserves her tenure does not bear on the fittingness of your envy of it. Furthermore, as envy is insensitive to desert, so too shame is insensitive to responsibility—these emotions and others are in this respect morally insensitive.<sup>18</sup> We believe that a common error in both ordinary thought and philosophical theorizing about certain emotions (especially about envy, shame, and amusement) is to “moralize” their shapes, by claiming them to involve moral assessments of their objects.

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<sup>17</sup> Notice that we can't always say F fits, but less of it; sometimes the size of the passion is built into its name. I can be annoyed, angry, or outraged; but these emotions all have roughly the same shape.

<sup>18</sup> Although these claims are controversial, several philosophers agree with us. On envy, see Rawls (1971, p. 533) and Nozick (1974, p. 17). On shame, see Isenberg (1949, esp. p. 368).

Conversely, when an emotion seems morally incorrigible, philosophers are tempted to convict it of some gross error, by attributing a patently false judgment to its shape. For example, some philosophers have attributed to jealousy the claim that the beloved is a thing capable of being possessed; or that any amount of the beloved's affection given to another diminishes the lover's share.<sup>19</sup> Although these are contrary interpretive mistakes, we think that they betray a common impulse. The temptation to pretty up some emotions and to dumb down others are both symptoms of a psychological tendency which we will call *moralism*. In its most general guise, moralism is the imperialistic tendency of moral considerations to take over the entirety of evaluative space. Both philosophical friends and foes of the emotions have fallen prey to moralistic error, we think, because of their common aversion to dissonance between the evaluative judgments presented to us by our emotions and by morality. This psychological tendency is quite understandable, because it's easy to be uncomfortable with the idea that a morally dubious emotion might nevertheless be fitting. Thus, to pretty up an emotion by moralizing its shape is to render a class of evaluative judgments unobjectionable; whereas to dumb an emotion down allows one to sacrifice its evaluative presentations to morality, by claiming for instance that jealousy is always unfitting (because people aren't things). In either case this is to effect a reconciliation between emotional and moral evaluation.

While there is more to be said about these issues, we cannot afford to go into them much further here; instead, we want to focus on a more general mistake about judgments of fittingness. This argument does not hang on our contention that people are prone mistakenly to insert moral concepts into the shapes of some emotions and factual errors into others. Rather, it follows from the fact that one is reluctant to endorse, in any respect, a feeling one deems to be wrong; and that to judge an emotion to be fitting is to endorse it—albeit only in a particular respect. This has tempted many philosophers into a mistaken pattern of inference, which we call (with a hint of irony) the moralistic fallacy. In the next section we will defend a dictum contrary to moralism, which belies this pattern of inference: we will argue that an emotion can be fitting despite its being wrong to feel.

### **The Moralistic Fallacy**

The most blatant way to commit the moralistic fallacy is simply to infer, from the claim that it would be morally objectionable to feel F toward X, that therefore F is not a fitting response to X. This inference is fallacious; it is belied by our dictum that an emotion can be fitting despite being wrong to

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<sup>19</sup> Gabrielle Taylor (1975) commits the first mistake; Jerome Neu (1980) corrects this error, but he falls prey to another moralistic error about envy. While we think it is also a mistake to attribute the second claim (the so-called Commodity Theory) to jealousy, that claim is much less clearly false. On this point see Daniel Farrell (1980).

feel. Such inferences can be understood as versions of a more general mistake: the thought that moral assessments of an emotion are relevant, *qua moral assessments*, to its fittingness. Were they so relevant, then one could sometimes use moral objections to feeling an emotion to explain the emotion's unfittingness. Such an explanation would, in effect, identify the moral impermissibility of feeling an emotion as the reason it doesn't fit. But we will contend that such inferences and explanations involve a philosophical error. Arguments from the rightness or wrongness of feeling F to its fittingness or unfittingness are never good arguments, even when they are valid; and explanations that adduce such moral evaluations aren't good explanations of why an emotion does or does not fit. Put most simply, our claim is that the wrongness of feeling an emotion never, in itself, constitutes a reason that the emotion doesn't fit.

Fallacy-mongering is notoriously suspect, for good reason: it is often "unamiable and profitless" (as Frankena dubbed Moore's charge of the naturalistic fallacy<sup>20</sup>), or at least uncharitable, to accuse one's philosophical opponents of fallacious reasoning. Most unformalized arguments are enthymatic, and if the implicit premise in this inference is a non-universal generalization—to the effect that *most* morally objectionable emotions are unfitting—then, even if our dictum is correct, the moralist's argument might be cogent.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, any argument can be made valid by adding premises: validity is cheap. Nevertheless, there is something to be said for the charge of fallacy, besides its rhetorical panache. When a certain form of argument is pervasive, and any suppressed premise that might be used to secure it from fallacy is false, it is unclear what interpretive charity demands. This is how things stand with the arguments we charge with the moralistic fallacy. We're prepared to back off from the strict charge of logical fallacy, in any given case, but we will stand by the claim that this pattern of argument or explanation is always mistaken. The complaint of a moralistic fallacy is thus a useful device, because it forces our opponents to make explicit suppressed premises which, when examined, can be shown to be dubious.

There are various forms of moral objection which can be leveled at the emotions and, consequently, several versions of the moralistic fallacy. Perhaps the most straightforward approach is to treat feelings like actions, by assessing them as right or wrong; but this is problematic, because judgments of wrongness are commonly taken to imply responsibility, and it is questionable to what degree we are responsible for our emotions. Nevertheless, we often evaluate a person's character on the basis of his emotional responses, whether or not we hold him responsible for them; and we typically hold

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<sup>20</sup> See William Frankena (1939) and G. E. Moore (1903).

<sup>21</sup> That is, if the premises are true, the conclusion would likely be true as well. However, it's difficult even to understand such a statistical claim about the emotions and their justification, much less to evaluate it.

people responsible for their emotions when they have, or ought to have, undertaken some long-term project of shaping their dispositions to feel them.<sup>22</sup> (Having registered this worry about evaluating emotions as right or wrong, we will now set it aside and assume that such judgments are in good order, while noting that our own arguments do not hang on any strong voluntarist assumptions.) The simplest way to commit the moralistic fallacy, then, is to infer, from the claim that an emotion is wrong to feel, that it does not fit its object. This is fallacious reasoning, however, because some considerations that suffice to make it wrong to feel an emotion are plainly irrelevant to its fittingness. When the consequences are sufficiently dire, it surely would be wrong to feel even an obviously fitting emotion (assuming, again, that you can help it).

For example, if you are widowed with young children, you must bring them up as best you can. Too much grief risks further harm to them, so it is incumbent upon you not to fall apart. Since the children need to go on with their lives, with as much security and as little trauma as possible, it would be wrong to indulge in the fitting amount of sorrow—the amount that accurately reflects the sadness of the situation. But this is not to suggest that the loss of a spouse isn't all that sad. Instead, it demonstrates that some moral reasons not to feel *F* are irrelevant to whether *X* is  $\Phi$ : in particular, those trading on the consequences of feeling some way, for yourself or others. But such *strategic* moral reasons, like our strategic prudential reasons not to envy Susan, are considerations of rationality—that is, of what to feel—which have no bearing on what feeling fits.

It might be objected, however, that what is wrong is to grieve too much in front of the children, for instance, or to laugh at a morally dubious joke—but not to be sad or amused, per se. Often it is better not to express or act on a fitting emotion; less frequently is it better not to feel the emotion at all.<sup>23</sup> Surely we can sometimes overmaster our emotions, having them (and hence being sensitive to the values they reveal) without expressing them when it is better not to do so. In normal human psychology, however, the relationship between feeling an emotion and expressing it—especially in involuntary behavior such as blushing, cringing, or crying—is exceedingly tight. More-

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<sup>22</sup> See Justin Oakley (1992) for an argument that it is appropriate to judge people's emotions morally whether or not they are responsible for them. We are unconvinced by this argument, which seems to take all forms of esteem and disesteem to be moral judgments, but we agree that some form of broadly ethical judgment is available.

<sup>23</sup> Matters are further complicated when several incompatible emotions would be fittingly directed at (perhaps different aspects of) the same object. This point, which has been pressed upon us by an anonymous referee, is especially important, since we certainly want to make room for the great human capacity for ambivalence. But this topic is too complex and delicate for us to pursue here. While we grant that it is a heuristic simplification to treat individual emotions in isolation, we don't think that this casts doubt on our arguments.

over, others are notoriously perceptive at sensing when we are inwardly amused by their plight or attempting to conceal our anger. Hence, many of us may be simply incapable of successfully pursuing the attractive ideal of feeling a fitting emotion while stifling it behaviorally, in order to express an incompatible attitude. If so, then it will be morally risky to feel the fitting emotion in such cases, and one will have reason not to take such risks merely in order to pay one's emotional respects to the funniness or sadness of the circumstance.

Despite Brandt's astute recognition of the significance of Y-able terms, and hence of the need to make sense of the fittingness of emotions, he was far too permissive about how the concept of fit can be explicated. He thus allows that "Utilitarians can say that Y is the 'fitting' attitude for me to take toward X, if my taking that attitude toward X will maximize the general well being" (Brandt, p. 116).<sup>24</sup> But it should be clear by now that, although the fact that to feel Y at X would maximize the general well being can be a powerful reason to feel it, it is irrelevant to the fittingness of Y to X. What is more, even the most sophisticated philosophical accounts of emotional fittingness fall into this error. For instance, though Patricia Greenspan's work on the emotions has many strengths, and we have adopted several aspects of her view, she too seems guilty of the moralistic fallacy.<sup>25</sup> Consider what she says about sadness: the fact that "sadness tends to inhibit corrective action makes it a sometimes unhelpful response to misfortune. For practical purposes, then, we may be justified in withholding the emotional response in circumstances that warrant it." This is surely right; the widowed spouse should consider the consequences of his grief, especially on the children, in deliberating about what to feel. Unfortunately, Greenspan goes on to claim that "this point also affects our view of things from a representational standpoint: Forgoing sadness is taken as rationally appropriate in a case in which sadness would also be appropriate, so that we have an important contrast to the assessment of belief warrant" (Greenspan 1995, p. 168).<sup>26</sup> But the sense in which it would be rational to forgo sadness is practical, not "representational"—that is, warranted or fitting. However unhelpful it would be to feel sorrow, the situation is no less tragic. So there is no real contrast

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<sup>24</sup> Whether or not Brandt's utilitarian is guilty of fallacious reasoning, this proposed gloss of emotional fittingness is untenable. It closes crucial normative issues, delivers the wrong answer in many cases, and begs the crucial question—like Moore's utilitarian gloss of goodness, which commits the so-called naturalistic fallacy.

<sup>25</sup> See especially (1995, pp. 166–70) and (1988, pp. 85–94, 137–44).

<sup>26</sup> We read Greenspan as intending her notion of "representational rationality" to do the work of our notion of fittingness (or its epistemic counterpart, warrant). If we are mistaken, then Greenspan may escape the charge of fallacy, but in that case none of her justificatory concepts get at the form of emotional assessment relevant to property ascription.

here to the assessment of belief warrant, since pragmatic reasons to reject a belief might similarly outweigh evidential reasons to adopt it.

A sophisticated moralist might hope to reformulate this argument so as to exclude strategic considerations from its purview. To do so, he must utilize a form of moral objection which is impervious to consequences. Philosophers sometimes speak of the “intrinsic wrongness” of an act, so as to mark this distinction. The moralist might then hope to infer, from the fact that it is intrinsically wrong to feel *F* toward *X*, that therefore *F* is not a fitting response to *X*. (For the rest of this discussion, we will use the term ‘wrong’ to mean intrinsically wrong, for the sake of brevity.) But excluding strategic considerations will not secure the inference from fallacy.

Gabrielle Taylor expresses sympathy for the thought that anger might be systematically wrong to feel, on the grounds that “it is wrong to be so concerned with what is due to one” (1975, p. 402).<sup>27</sup> Although we think this claim is far too strong, we will grant it to her for the sake of argument. Unfortunately, Taylor takes this moral objection to feeling anger as a demonstration that “anger...should be classed among those emotions which one is never justified in feeling” (1975, pp. 401–2). By ‘justified’, she means warranted or fitting: “an emotional reaction is unjustified if it rests on irrationally mistaken beliefs or when it is disproportionate to a given situation” (1975, p. 393).<sup>28</sup> But even if it’s wrong to be so concerned with one’s due, this does not show that anger isn’t fitting—only that one ought not to feel it. Perhaps I should ignore slights rather than be angered by them, but it does not follow that nothing you could do to me counts as a slight or unjust harm, as anger (very roughly) presents it. Indeed, surely such slights can be more or less egregious; hence, more or less anger will be fitting in response to them, although (by stipulation) none is ever permissible. Taylor’s argument thus seems to be committed to the moralistic fallacy. The most natural way to make it valid is by adopting a suppressed and question-begging premise, to the effect that if it is wrong to feel *F*, then *F* must be unfitting. As long as this premise is suppressed, the argument is invalid and Taylor is guilty of the moralistic fallacy, strictly speaking. But to make the crucial premise explicit is not to improve the reasoning; it is simply to relocate the error from the inference to the assumptions of the argument. We will therefore continue to accuse such arguments of committing the moralistic fallacy, albeit in a looser sense of the term.

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<sup>27</sup> One obvious difficulty with this discussion is that anger isn’t always concerned with what is due to one; one can also be angry at the way others are treated. But we will understand Taylor’s argument to be directed only at anger specifically as a response to slights to oneself.

<sup>28</sup> Note that Taylor’s cognitivism commits her to thinking that an unwarranted emotion must include a false or unjustified belief.



Moralistic thinking is perhaps most tempting about amusement, because that emotion is less structured than those we've considered so far. Not even a rough-and-ready gloss of its evaluative presentation can be given, beyond the uninformative claim that amusement presents something as funny. (This is uninformative because funny is a response-dependent property; to think something funny is simply to think it a fitting object of amusement.<sup>29</sup>) At any rate, moralistic claims and arguments are most prevalent here. Perhaps it is wrong to be amused at an offensive joke, not simply in virtue of the bad consequences of your amusement (such as hurtful laughter), but because—as both Ronald de Sousa (1987, p. 290) and Richard Moran (1996, esp. pp. 93–94) claim—simply to be amused at a sexist joke “marks you as sexist.” We will suspend our qualms about the sweepingness of this claim, and will grant it to the moralist for the sake of argument. Nevertheless, to infer that offensive jokes are never funny, or even that their humor is always diminished by their morally dubious qualities, would be to commit the moralistic fallacy. This seems to be exactly what Elizabeth Anderson does when she writes that:

A person may laugh at a racist joke, but be embarrassed at her laughter. Her embarrassment reflects a judgment that her amusement was not an appropriate response to the joke. The joke was not genuinely good or funny: it did not merit laughter. (Anderson 1993, p. 2)

We think, to the contrary, that some offensive jokes are funnier than others, and not because they are less offensive. This is a contentious claim, however; though several philosophers agree with us on this point, others do not—and few give reasons. Comic moralists typically infer their conclusion from the stipulated moral claim (that it's wrong to be amused by such jokes); but to move from the moral inappropriateness of amusement to its unfittingness is to commit the moralistic fallacy. In claiming that offensive jokes are “axiologically mistaken,” de Sousa seems to be attempting to discharge his obligation to show that amusement is not merely wrong but unfitting; but his argument for this claim is uncharacteristically obscure. Although we cannot pursue this topic in adequate detail here, the task of prosecuting the argument against this comic moralism is taken on elsewhere (cf. Jacobson 1997).

The intuition that a joke can be funny even though it is wrong to be amused by it is, we think, quite powerful. Our position may seem to be undermined, however, by the fact that when moral indignation is our first reaction to an offensive joke, we may find ourselves declaring, “That's not funny.” But, as Kendall Walton astutely suggests, such pronouncements might best be taken with a grain of salt:

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<sup>29</sup> Roger Scruton (1987, esp. p. 162) is most perspicuous on the failure of Theories of Humor that aspire to give non-response-dependent accounts. Morreall (1987) also contains some useful examples of the views Scruton criticizes.

We may declare pointedly that it is not funny, precisely because its message is offensive. To laugh at it, we may feel, would amount to endorsing its message, so we refuse to laugh. Even judging it to be funny may feel like expressing agreement. [However,] we must not simply assume that this declaration is to be taken literally... (Walton 1994, p. 30)<sup>30</sup>

We agree. People are prone to declare that an offensive joke isn't funny as a matter of course, in order to avoid making any sort of endorsement of an offensive joke. Suppose de Sousa is right that it's sexist (or racist, etc.) merely to be amused at a morally dubious joke; but suppose also that we don't assume that, as comic moralism claims, such jokes cannot be genuinely funny. If some offensive jokes are funny, we should expect two things. First, moralists will not be inclined to laugh at them, since that would involve an expression of amusement; nor are they likely to admit to being amused, since by their lights that would be tantamount to admitting to sexism. Second, moralists can be expected to feel guilty about any morally dubious amusement to which they remain prone. These pressures might well ultimately efface both their laughter and their amusement entirely. But while this process may be one of moral ascent, it can equally well be described as a matter of growing progressively less sensitive to an aspect of the funny. (How central an aspect this is will depend upon the place of social repudiation in humor; the greater a role one gives it, the more central this aspect becomes.)

There is another way of arguing from wrongness to unfittingness which is worth examining, although we expect few philosophers will want to adopt it. One could hold the moral view that fit is always exculpatory: the fact that an emotion fits its object ensures that it isn't wrong to feel. We think this untenable as a general principle, but it has some appeal in the case at hand. If a joke really is funny, one might think, then it isn't wrong to be amused. This coherent moral claim would allow a philosopher to deny our dictum that amusement might be fitting despite being wrong to feel. Indeed, it would license a valid inference (by *modus tollens*) from the wrongness of feeling an emotion to its unfittingness. But our complaint against the moralistic fallacy does not rest on the dictum, nor on the claim that our opponents are guilty of a fallacious inference. The crucial point is that, even if fit were exculpatory, the moralist would be mistaking the order of explanation. One could say that it's permissible to be amused simply because a joke is funny; but not that a joke isn't funny because it's wrong to be amused. The price of the doctrine that fit is exculpatory is that one forswears adducing the wrongness of an emotional response as a reason the emotion doesn't fit.

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<sup>30</sup> Although Walton's argument in this paper is easily read as an endorsement of comic moralism, he abjures this conclusion (in conversation). However, like McDowell, he seems not amply to appreciate the importance of his own insight. Thus, he writes that there is "not much to be gained" by deciding whether or not such claims are to be taken literally; but this is, in fact, just the crucial issue.

As with sadness, anger, guilt, and amusement, so too with envy, jealousy, and shame: these emotions may fit their object despite being wrong to feel. Indeed, we think this dictum holds of all basic emotions; but these are the emotions against which it is most plausible to raise non-strategic moral objections. Let's return again to your envy of Susan, your recently tenured colleague. Suppose your tactless friend Leonard were to say that this envy isn't appropriate, because Susan deserved promotion and you don't. Sadly, Leonard's blunt assessment of your work is accurate. Yet, we want to say, this does not bear at all on whether the promotion is enviable. Leonard can be allowed to argue, on these grounds, that it would be wrong for you to envy Susan—this claim hangs on a moral judgment which we will not contest; but he cannot properly adduce considerations of desert to question the fittingness of your envy.<sup>31</sup> This is because, as John Rawls puts it, "envy is not a moral feeling" (1971, p. 533); it does not present its object as undeserving or unjust.<sup>32</sup> Hence, our dictum seems to hold for this case as well, unless we and Rawls are wrong about envy.

But desert is relevant to the fittingness of some other emotions, such as outrage. The fact that Susan is deserving surely bears on whether the tenure committee's decision was outrageous—it wasn't. Since Susan deserves tenure, it might be wrong, as well as unfitting, to be outraged at her promotion. If so, then her deservingness is both the reason your outrage is wrong and the reason it doesn't fit. But we can allow that some reasons why it is wrong to feel an emotion are also reasons why that emotion doesn't fit. Remember that what we are committed to denying is that the wrongness of feeling the emotion counts, *qua moral consideration*, against its fittingness. To illustrate this point, we will consider one final example.

Suppose that, in addition to being a newly-tenured colleague, Susan is also your close friend. Furthermore, let's grant that this suffices to make it wrong to be envious of her tenure: it is wrong to be bothered by well-deserved good things that happen to your friends, and envy is a form of bother. Since the wrongness of feeling this way does not depend on the consequences of your being envious, the fact that Susan is your friend shows your emotion to be intrinsically wrong. Might it also show that envy doesn't fit? Recall the shape of envy, as roughly characterized earlier: it presents (i) a rival (ii) as having something good which you lack, and (iii) this difference in success or possession, as such, as being bad for you. (That is, it's not merely

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<sup>31</sup> Of course, you can expect to feel even worse when a rival gains an undeserved success, but this doesn't mean that you envy the rival more because she is undeserving. It's likely that you feel both envy and outrage or resentment, simultaneously; but evidence that the rival was in fact deserving bears only on the fittingness of your resentment, not your envy.

<sup>32</sup> Rawls concludes that envy is therefore (almost) always "irrational"; but his argument depends upon normative claims which we think are belied by human nature and the prevalence of positional goods.

your lack of possession that is bad for you; it's worse still that he has it and you don't.) If our rough gloss of envy's shape is correct, then in order for the fact that Susan is your friend to be brought to bear on the fit of envy, it must call one of these aspects of envy's shape into question. But which aspect? Your friendship clearly doesn't make her promotion any less good, so the argument must focus on either (i) or (iii). Start with (i). It's easy to imagine someone saying "She's your friend, not your rival"; but surely that would be naive. We sometimes do compete with our friends. The idea that someone is either a rival or a friend, but never both, is a childishly simple view of social relations; the fact that she is your friend does not show that she is not also, in some respects, your rival. (Which is not to say that envy isn't often corrosive of friendship; indeed, that was precisely our point in suggesting that you have reason not to envy Susan.)

Perhaps the suggestion is rather that because Susan is your friend, her promotion isn't bad for you. We confess to finding the idea that a friend's success *cannot* be bad for you to be rather quaint. As Peter Railton observes, "People, or at least some people, might be put together in a way that makes some not-very-appetizing things essential to their flourishing, and we do not want to be guilty of wishful thinking on this score" (Railton 1986, p. 177). But the crucial point is that, even were this suggestion true, it would not vindicate the moralistic fallacy. Let's stipulate, then, that because she is your friend, Susan's promotion isn't bad for you. Suppose, moreover, that this is not just because of the crass strategic consideration broached earlier, that she'll soon be deciding on your own case. Even considered simply in itself, her promotion isn't bad for you. If one's interests can extend beyond narrowly self-regarding concerns at all, it is plausible to suppose that they can embrace the flourishing of one's friends and family. It follows from this stipulation that your envy misrepresents your interests. This is a common mistake, which is by no means unique to envy—we are often mistaken about what is good or bad for us. But though it must be granted that your envy doesn't fit its object, the wrongness of the emotion is a red herring: it plays no role in the argument that your envy is unfitting. Even someone who denied that it was wrong of you to envy Susan must grant that if Susan's promotion isn't actually bad for you, *as your envy presents it as being*, then the emotion is unfitting. Hence, it isn't the wrongness of envying a friend, but the mistake about your interests, which shows envy not to fit. In this case there are common considerations—that Susan is your friend, and that her promotion isn't bad for you—which are relevant to both claims. But that doesn't make it the case that, even here, your envy is unfitting because it is wrong.

Once the distinction between moral questions about an emotion and the question of its fittingness is acknowledged, we think it pretty clear that the moralistic fallacy is a mistake, in any of its various guises; and we hope that our arguments to this point have convinced the reader. But we have not yet

addressed virtue theory, which might appear to offer the most compelling version of moralism. Indeed, Brandt's ultimate proposal for how to understand emotional fittingness runs along these lines. He suggests that,

[T]o say 'X is the fitting object of Y' is at least to imply, if not to assert, that X actually would arouse Y in the 'ideal' man—the man with the accepted or approved scheme of values and personality structure. (Brandt 1946, p. 116)

We doubt that the suggestion that fittingness can be elucidated through the reactions of a virtuous person can succeed. None of the conflicting ideas that enter into virtue-theoretic thinking about the emotions poses a plausible threat to our doctrine that moral considerations about what to feel are independent from, and irrelevant to, questions of fittingness. We cannot fully establish this here, because virtue theories are so disparate and are difficult to characterize in any way that satisfies all their advocates. But we can offer some reasons to doubt that virtue theory is congenial to moralism.

One must be wary of a crucial ambiguity in this talk of an "ideal man" who is supposed to be the standard of fitting feeling. The danger is of confusing the concept of a virtuous person with that of an ideal observer. Thus, this man's attributes might be selected precisely with a view to ensuring that his responses are fitting, rather than that he is an admirable person. Then it might be stipulated that what it is for an emotion to be fitting is for it to be how such an "ideal observer" would respond (cf. Firth 1952). Notice, though, that the ideal observer isn't necessarily an ideal agent; nothing guarantees that this character will be virtuous. Of course, although there is no necessity linking these traits, neither is there any conceptual impossibility involved in putting them together. The idea that virtue involves an emotional sensitivity to evaluative features of the world has both inherent appeal and an impressive philosophical pedigree, so it is possible to treat being an ideal observer as a requirement of virtue. Nevertheless, were Brandt's proposal glossed along these lines, his account would offer no defense of moralism. It would not invoke any distinctively ethical constraints on feeling as considerations of fit; it would simply make the propensity to have fitting feelings a requirement of virtue.

However, Brandt surely does not mean to be advancing an ideal observer theory of  $\Phi$ -properties. By describing his ideal man as having the "accepted or approved" values and personality, he clearly intends to invoke ideals of virtue to explicate the fittingness of feeling. On this view, substantive ideals about what kind of person to be provide ethical standards for what to feel, which then determine or explain the fittingness of those feelings. If an ideal of virtue (as opposed to an ideal observer) supplied a plausible standard of fittingness, this would indeed be a victory for moralism. But many of our earlier arguments against moralism apply to this virtue-based view as well. Whatever reasons made it compelling to see certain emotional responses as

intrinsically wrong to feel will presumably also suggest that it would not be virtuous to feel them. Yet we've argued that various reactions can be fitting despite being wrong, and hence vicious, to feel. So if virtue requires avoiding feelings it would be intrinsically wrong to feel, it will not even call for all and only fitting emotions, let alone determine or explain fittingness.

Moreover, the gap between standards of virtue and fit does not depend upon anything specific to narrowly moral complaints about certain feelings, which the more broadly ethical stance of virtue theory might avoid. The virtue of courage, for instance, is a matter of weighing the risks against the stakes, so as to act well (and perhaps also, as Aristotle has it, to act with proper feeling). When the stakes are great enough, however, and the brave warrior faces a battle that simply must not be lost, fear seems to have no contribution to make to right action. Given the attractions of an (Aristotelian) ideal of a person whose feelings and motives are in harmony with his actions, we think that the best thing to say about some such cases is that the brave warrior is unafraid, even though this is a genuinely fearful situation. He focuses on the task at hand, ignoring the fearful odds. But then standards of virtue will call for avoiding an emotion that is granted to fit.<sup>33</sup>

Of course, it is open to the virtue theorist to deny these claims, and to insist that virtue requires one to feel the fitting emotion while giving no expression to it. But, denatured of any behavioral outlet, such an emotion would be a mysterious free wheel in the virtuous person's psychology. Why posit these useless and potentially disastrous emotions? We submit that this insistence is not motivated by any compelling ethical ideal, but by a temptation to see the virtuous person as being, in addition, an ideal observer. Hence, the tendency to suppose that the brave warrior will be afraid in the face of fearful odds, without acting on or even expressing this emotion, is to be diagnosed as an urge to make virtue in all respects unimpeachable. If so, then the tail is wagging the dog in this virtue-theoretic moralism: no distinctively *ethical* consideration about what to feel is being adduced to explicate fittingness. Rather, considerations of fit are being treated as standards of virtuous feeling.

No doubt some virtue theorists will remain unconvinced, and perhaps at this point they will suggest that the distinction between questions of fit and questions of propriety is somehow undermined by proper appreciation of the standards of virtuous feeling. This is a heroic thought, to which we will offer a modest response. Another possibility is that virtue theory is pulled in various directions on questions of feeling, but that virtue's primary commit-

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<sup>33</sup> The force of this example does not rest on anything distinctive to fear, or to the negative emotions. Consider pity, a central "caring" emotion. Critical thinking textbooks routinely warn us of the informal fallacy of Appeal to Pity. Yet, if there is a fallacy here, it is not that we are led to pity what isn't genuinely pitiful, but that we are prone to act unjustly when in the grip of pity, whether or not the emotion is fitting.

ment must be to proper action and its secondary commitment to feeling *what to feel*. If we are right that what to feel can come apart from what feeling fits, then the virtuous person won't always feel fitting emotions. Moreover, we think that our distinctions help to explicate various kinds of emotional appropriateness, or inappropriateness, involved in ordinary conceptions of virtue and vice. The coward who screams at a mouse and the coward who flees the crucial battle, or merely cowers in the face of fearful odds, are quite different sorts. What they have in common is simply that each is afraid, and acts upon or expresses it, when fear isn't what to feel. In the first case, this is because fear is unfitting; in the second, because the preeminent importance of the stakes makes it contrary to virtue to behave as admittedly fitting fear urges.

We do not claim to have settled these issues here, but merely to have put forward a challenge to a virtue theory that aspires to elucidate fitting feeling—which, of course, such theories need not do. We contend that it isn't the virtuousness of feeling *F* that makes it fitting (or the viciousness that makes it unfitting), even when both claims are true. Virtue and vice, like right and wrong, are red herrings in this dispute. Some other features of the circumstance make *F* fitting, and these features would make the emotion fit whatever one thought about its propriety. Given that what to feel, all things considered, can apparently deviate from what feeling fits, it must be *argued* that the virtuous person will somehow always manage to have fitting emotions nevertheless; and the burdens on any such argument are severe. It thus cannot simply be inferred, from the fact that a virtuous person would feel *F* at *X*, that *X* is therefore  $\Phi$ .

### Conclusion

The trouble with the moralistic fallacy is that it introduces moral considerations at the wrong place in ethical deliberation. For all we've said, they still may be decisive considerations about what to feel. Still, moral objections to feeling an emotion cannot be brought to bear on whether things are funny, enviable, fearsome, etc.—that is, on the attribution of response-dependent properties. While such reasoning is fallacious, the mistake is a natural one, best explained as a product of the psychological tendency we term moralism. To call an emotion fitting is, *in a specific and limited way*, to endorse it; but people tend to be uncomfortable with any endorsement of feelings that are morally objectionable. Moralism is thus in tension with a plausible sort of pluralism, on which genuine values—which include but are not limited to moral values—can compete and conflict with one another. Although we find such a pluralism congenial, our arguments against the moralistic fallacy do not rest on broad issues of philosophical allegiance. Here we have simply argued that one cannot infer, from the fact that some emotion *F* is wrong to feel, that therefore *F* is not a fitting response to its object *X*: that *X* isn't  $\Phi$ .

Nor can one explain why F doesn't fit its object, on a given occasion, by appealing to the claim that it would be wrong to feel F at X.

But surely moral considerations *are* sometimes relevant to the fittingness of an emotion, it might now be objected—in fact, we've admitted as much ourselves. We granted that because Susan deserved her promotion, it was not at all outrageous. And 'outrageous', like 'enviable', is a  $\Phi$ -term; something is outrageous just in case outrage at it is fitting. This objection misconstrues our argument. We are not claiming that there are no circumstances under which some moral consideration is relevant to the fit of an emotion. However, to see when and how moral considerations can properly be brought to bear on issues of emotional fittingness and property ascription, one must distinguish between moral assessments of *feeling* an emotion and moral considerations about its *object*.

This will be made clear if we first consider an analogous distinction, between prudential considerations about emotions and their objects. "You mustn't let it sense that you're afraid" is a good reason not to fear the approaching wolf; but, unfortunately, it is no reason to doubt that the wolf is fearsome. It would be a kind of prudential fallacy to infer, from the fact that it would be bad for you to be afraid, that your fear is therefore unfitting. But of course prudential reasons concerning the object of one's fear are relevant to the emotion's fittingness, since fear's evaluative presentation is roughly of something as an imminent threat to one's interests. Thus, "Don't worry, it can't hurt you" is a prudential consideration about the harmless mouse, in that it speaks to your interests (by claiming that they are not threatened); and this is clearly relevant to the fittingness of your fear. While the first suggestion is good strategic advice, only the second claims that the object of your emotion is not as your emotion presents it. Such considerations about the object of fear are relevant to the fittingness of fear because that emotion has what might be called a *prudential shape*: it is concerned, at least in part, with one's interests. But while fear has a prudential shape, prudential reasons not to be afraid are never relevant, as such, to its fittingness.

A similar distinction will help determine the relevance of moral considerations to the fittingness of emotions. Our arguments against the moralistic fallacy showed that moral considerations *about feeling an emotion* are never relevant to its fit, but moral considerations about the object of an emotion may or may not be relevant. This will depend on whether the particular emotion's shape is moral, in the sense that fear's shape is prudential. Guilt and anger have been called "moral emotions" precisely because they present their objects in the light of such moral concepts as desert, fault, and responsibility. Hence, moral features of a situation can properly be invoked to contest the fittingness of guilt or anger as responses to it, and in some cases they suffice to show that the emotion fails to fit. By contrast, envy and several other emotions are morally insensitive. This is why the issue of what Susan



deserves is relevant to the fittingness of your anger, but not of your envy. We will say that an emotion has a *moral shape* to the extent that its evaluative presentation concerns the fundamental moral concepts. Were moral considerations sufficient to determine whether a given emotion fits, then it would have a wholly moral shape and could properly be called a moral emotion.<sup>34</sup> Even so, while guilt and anger have partly moral shapes, moral reasons not to feel them are never relevant, as such, to their fittingness.

Our goal in this paper is not to segregate morality from the emotions, but to sort out and begin to arbitrate between their potentially conflicting concerns. On our view, if moral philosophy is to profit from its current focus on the emotions, it must be through a genuine engagement with the philosophy of emotion. Conversely, though, the philosophical study of the emotions must be far more delicate than it has been, in its approach to moral valuation. In several respects, moralism has been a source of philosophical error here: it is manifested both in the moralistic fallacy and in the tendency to moralize the shapes of the emotions. These errors muddle the questions of emotional fittingness which commonplace practices of property ascription commit us to answering. Vindication of our everyday judgments involving response-dependent properties requires that we have a handle on the shapes of the emotions; and we cannot hope to determine what is and isn't shameful, enviable, or fearsome without carefully examining the natures of their associated emotions. The traditional focus of moral philosophy on the propriety of emotional response obscures rather than advances this inquiry.

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<sup>34</sup> Among the neo-sentimentalists, at least Gibbard holds this to be true of guilt; but we are skeptical of this claim and think guilt sometimes fits even when one has not acted wrongly. See D'Arms and Jacobson (1994).

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