1-1-2012

The Three-Fold Significance of the Blaming Emotions

Zac Cogley
Northern Michigan University, zcogley@nmu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.nmu.edu/philosophy_publication

Part of the Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons, and the Philosophy of Mind Commons

Recommended Citation
http://commons.nmu.edu/philosophy_publication/4

This Grant is brought to you for free and open access by The Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publication by an authorized administrator of The Commons. For more information, please contact kclumpne@nmu.edu, kmcdonou@nmu.edu, mburgmei@nmu.edu, bbarjean@nmu.edu.
REASSIGNED TIME AWARD COVER PAGE

Applicant Name: Zac Cogley Department: Philosophy

Rank: Assistant Professor Tenured Tenure-earning

Contact Phone: (906)-227-2014 Email Address: zcogley@nmu.edu

Project Title: The Three-Fold Significance of the Blaming Emotions

Date(s) of previous Reassigned Time Awards: Winter, 2011

Project Abstract: (250 words or less)

Much of the philosophical work on moral responsibility assumes that we should understand people's moral responsibility for the actions they take in terms of the appropriateness of the blaming emotions—resentment, anger, and indignation. However, current theorizing about the blaming emotions is often psychologically uninformed. Drawing on work in empirical psychology, I have recently argued that anger serves three functions in human psychology: appraisal, motivation, and communication. In this project, I propose to extend that analysis to the entire class of blaming emotions. I will show that theorizing about moral responsibility is myopic if it focuses on one of the functions of the blaming emotions while ignoring the others. I plan to extend this more psychologically realistic account of the blaming emotions to some philosophically puzzling phenomena. Specifically, I have in mind the moral responsibility of psychopaths and people who are morally insane. I also plan to use the analysis to shed light on the moral responsibility of drug users, as well the appropriateness of holding responsible wrongdoers who have been subject to unjust formative circumstances.

Semester when project will be conducted: Winter, 2012

Number of load credits the applicant will teach during the award semester, if applicant receives a Reassigned Time Award: 8 credits

Applicant's Signature: Zac Cogley Date: 9/16/2011

By signing below, the applicant's Department Head and Dean are approving the requested reassigned time and are offering their assurance they will be able to cover the affected course offering(s) with either adjunct instructors, other departmental faculty, or some combination thereof.

Department Head Signature: Date: Sept 16, 2011

College Dean Signature: Date: Sept 16, 2011

DATE RECEIVED IN OFFICE OF GRANTS AND RESEARCH:
Introduction

Last year I received a Reassigned Time Award to write a book chapter on virtue and vice with respect to anger. The award was incredibly helpful and fruitful; my chapter is part of a forthcoming volume from Oxford University Press on philosophical accounts of individual virtues. I was also able to use some of my research to develop and offer a new course: Philosophy and Psychology of Emotion. This year I propose to use NMU’s Reassigned Time Award to complete a book chapter on what I term “The Three-Fold Significance of the Blaming Emotions.” Many philosophers working on moral responsibility (Bennett 1980; Watson 1993; Wallace 1994; Fischer and Ravizza 1998; McKenna 1998) follow P.F. Strawson in thinking that we should understand claims about someone’s moral responsibility in terms of the appropriateness of the blaming emotions: anger, resentment, and indignation (Strawson 1982). But even those who would not follow Strawson in identifying moral responsibility attributions with the appropriateness of emotions hold that emotions play an important role in our moral responsibility practice (Scanlon 2008). In spite of this, the significance of blaming emotions for our moral responsibility practices has been philosophically under-theorized.

In my recent research and writing on virtue and vices of anger, I argue that anger has three functions in human psychology. Anger functions as an appraisal of wrongdoing, as a motivation to action, and as a communicative device. But this can be extended from anger to all three blaming emotions. First, the blaming emotions appraise the actions of a person as wrongful. Much of the psychological research on appraisal and emotion holds that appraisal causes emotions. But holding that the blaming emotions are caused by an appraisal of a person’s action mistakes the relationship between the two. There is not
clear scientific evidence that all episodes of the blaming emotions are caused by a relevant appraisal, and not all psychologists agree that appraisals always precede emotions or are necessary for it (Berkowitz and Harmon-Jones 2004a; Berkowitz and Harmon-Jones 2004b; Parkinson 1999). We better understand the relationship between the blaming emotions and appraisal (and emotion and appraisal, more generally) if we hold that the blaming emotions are not caused by the appraisal that an act is wrong; rather, the blaming emotions are appraisals of actions as wrong (Parkinson 1997). Thus, the blaming emotions can be appropriate or inappropriate depending on whether or not their appraisal is accurate.

The blaming emotions also motivate actions. For example, the blaming emotions are a common and powerful cause of aggression (Baumeister and Bushman 2007, 66), though they are neither necessary nor sufficient for it (Averill 1982; Tavris 1989). In general, the blaming emotions energize people, motivate them to approach the target of the blaming emotion (E. Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones 2007, 103–105), and lead people to try to change their situation (Baumeister and Bushman 2007, 67). Thus, the blaming emotions can be appropriate or inappropriate depending on the actions they are likely to motivate.

Finally, the blaming emotions are not just appraisals of a situation that generate characteristic motivations; they also involve communicative acts or responses. For example, one of the most striking things about the blaming emotions and anger, in particular, is that they are associated with communicative facial expressions (Ekman 1999). These communications are then observed, responded to, or ignored by other people, thus providing another opportunity for emotional engagement. People feeling the
blaming emotions communicate that the target of their anger has acted wrongfully and urge others to share their anger at the target, thereby, implicitly at least, sharing their appraisal of the target. Thus, the blaming emotions can be appropriate or inappropriate depending on whether it is appropriate to communicate their appraisal and to urge others to share the motivations of the person feeling the blaming emotion.

Now I am interested in extending these claims to the idea that the blaming emotions are tightly connected to our moral responsibility practices thus breaking through an impasse in the moral responsibility literature. It is common for a philosopher defending one view of moral responsibility to critique that of another as philosophically myopic. To take just one example, some philosophers hold that people are morally responsible when blaming or praising them produces good consequences (Mill 1979; Dennett 1984). That view has recently been criticized as unacceptably shallow (Smilansky 2001) because it ignores the appraisal dimension of moral responsibility attribution. In response, I argue that this view characterizes important parts of our moral responsibility practices in virtue of the motivation function of the blaming emotions. Our motivational reserves are not limitless; we have to decide where and when to direct our energies. Thus an important constraint on when it makes sense to feel the blaming emotions toward someone is whether it would produce good consequences.

We therefore make more progress in understanding moral responsibility if we accept that we have several interests in play in holding people morally responsible and that these interests roughly conform to the psychological functions of the blaming emotions. No extant theory of moral responsibility takes all three functions into account. I argue that to do justice to our moral responsibility practices our theory must take all
three into account. My aim in the proposed work is to defend this new theory of moral responsibility and show why it is a better candidate for capturing our moral responsibility practices than any other extant view.

Not only do I hope to provide a corrective to simplistic thinking about moral responsibility, but I also hope to use the account of moral responsibility that emerges from a psychological examination of the blaming emotions to address some puzzling issues. For example, my framework can help us understand the moral responsibility of psychopaths and people who are morally insane, and I believe my analysis can be extended to address the ambivalence we feel about holding responsible wrongdoers who have been subject to unfair formative circumstances, as well as the reasons for and against holding drug abusers morally responsible.

This project on the three-fold significance of the blaming emotions will result in an 8,000 to 10,000-word chapter to be included in a forthcoming volume of *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility*, edited by David Shoemaker. If I am granted reassigned time for the Winter term, I will be able to complete a draft of the chapter by the mid-semester recess, with the aim of having two months for revisions and edits before the final submission deadline next summer. I also hope to use the fruits of my research to develop or augment new courses, as I did with my Philosophy and Psychology of Emotion course this term.

**Methods**

I term my methodology ‘Psychological and Biological Realism’—the conviction that philosophical accounts of morality and other distinctively human concepts must be
based on actual human psychology. Because of this interdisciplinary theoretical orientation, I must make a practice of staying on top of the literature in several different fields: biology, psychology, sociology, and philosophy. This requires an enormous amount of attention to developments in these disciplines, especially empirical psychology, where new work on the emotions and morality is generated almost daily. A Reassigned Time Award will thus help ensure that I have time to continue my interdisciplinary inquiries.

As my methods combine philosophical and sociological inquiry with an eye toward new research on relevant psychological and biological mechanisms, I will not need any special equipment other than my current NMU resources: my office, computer, and library access.

**Reassigned Time**

To ensure the successful timely completion of this project, I request a 4-credit release for the Winter semester. My normal teaching load allows time for research, but during the Winter term, I am scheduled to teach at least one new upper-level course—History of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy—as well as two others. I prefer to not have to balance my high standards for teaching against the time-sensitive nature of this undertaking. Four credits of reassigned time will ensure that I can stay true to my commitment to discussion-based learning in the classes I will teach while completing this significant project.
Works Cited


Zac Cogley  
Curriculum Vitae

Department of Philosophy  
Northern Michigan University  
1401 Presque Isle Ave  
Marquette, MI 49855  
Work Phone: (906) 227-2014  
Email: zcogley@nmu.edu

Academic Employment  
Assistant Professor, Northern Michigan University, 2010-present  
Visiting Lecturer, University of California, Los Angeles, 2006-2008

Education  
The Ohio State University, Ph.D., Philosophy, 2010  
University of Cincinnati, M.A., Philosophy, 2001  
St. Louis University, B.A., Philosophy, Summa Cum Laude, 1998

Areas of Specialization  
Ethics, Political and Social Philosophy, Agency Theory

Areas of Competence  
Philosophy of Law, Applied Ethics (especially Medical Ethics), Feminist Philosophy

Fellowships and Awards  
Faculty Reassigned Time Award, Northern Michigan University, 2010  
Graduate Student Outstanding Paper Prize, Eastern Division Meeting of the APA, 2009  
Travel Grant, Edward F. Hayes Graduate Research Forum, The Ohio State University, 2006  
Graduate School Leadership Award Nominee, 2004  
Fellow of The Ohio State University Graduate School, 2001-02  
Departmental Nominee, University Finalist, University of Cincinnati Summer Graduate Fellowship, 2000  
Phi Beta Kappa, 1998  
Charles Phelps Taft Fellow at University of Cincinnati, 1998-99

Publications  
“Trust and the Trickster Problem.” Analytic Philosophy. (forthcoming)

Presentations  
“The Significance of the Blaming Emotions”  
New Orleans Workshop on Agency and Responsibility, 2011 (upcoming)

“Virtuous and Vicious Anger”  
Northern Michigan University, 2011  
Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress (refereed poster), 2011
“Modifying the Reactive Attitudes: Reply to Goldman”
Central States Philosophical Association, 2010

“Moral Responsibility, Manipulation, and Two Concepts of Desert”
Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress, 2010

“Trust and the Trickster Problem”
Eastern American Philosophical Association Meeting, 2009
Feminist Ethics and Social Theory Conference, 2009
Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress (refereed poster), 2009

“Does Morality Demand Our Very Best? On Moral Prescriptions and the Line of Duty:
Reply to Ferry”
Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress, 2009

“Free Will and Reasonable Doubt: Reply to Vilhauer”
Pacific Division APA Meeting, 2008

“Plum-Confused about Blame and Responsibility”
Southern California Philosophy Conference, 2007

“Strawson on What to Feel, and Why” (with Daniel Farrell)
Contemporary Analytic Philosophy Conference on Regulating Attitudes with Reasons, 2006

“Protecting Intentions from Mental Birth Control: Reply to Buckareff”
Inland Northwest Philosophy Conference on Action, Ethics, and Responsibility, 2006

“Mitigation and Responsibility”
32nd Conference on Value Inquiry, 2005

“Responsibility and Integrity”
North American Society for Social Philosophy, 2004

“Kantian Dirty Hands”

“Whose Evaluative Practice, Which Self-Understanding?”
Ohio Philosophical Association Meeting, 2002

“Feyerabend’s Incommensurability Thesis in Against Method”
Ohio Philosophical Association Meeting, 2000

“Why Scientists Don't Misunderstand Each Other--Feyerabend on Incommensurability”
Kentucky State Annual Conference on Science and Culture, 2000
PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS
American Philosophical Association
Association for Feminist Ethics and Social Theory

WORKS IN PROGRESS
“Virtuous and Vicious Anger”
“Anger is a Gift”
“The Three-Fold Significance of the Blaming Emotions”

SERVICE
UNIVERSITY
Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, 2010-present

DEPARTMENTAL
Departmental Evaluation Committee, 2010-present

PROFESSIONAL
Journal Referee: Philosophical Studies

COMMUNITY
Marquette General Health System Ethics Committee, 2011-present

COURSES TAUGHT
FULL RESPONSIBILITY — Upper Level Courses
Philosophy and Psychology of Emotion, Northern Michigan University
Social and Political Philosophy, Northern Michigan University
Medical Ethics, University of California, Los Angeles
Society and Morals, University of California, Los Angeles
Early Modern Political Philosophy, University of California, Los Angeles
Philosophy of Law, University of California, Los Angeles
Contemporary Social and Moral Problems in the United States,
   The Ohio State University

FULL RESPONSIBILITY — Introductory Level Courses
Fundamentals of Ethical Theory, Northern Michigan University
Issues in Legal Ethics, Northern Michigan University
Issues in Business Ethics, Northern Michigan University
Issues in Medical Ethics, Northern Michigan University
Issues in Computer Ethics, Northern Michigan University
Introduction to Ethical Theory, University of California, Los Angeles
Introduction to Ethics, The Ohio State University
Political and Social Philosophy, The Ohio State University
Introduction to Ethics, University of Cincinnati
TEACHING ASSISTANT

Philosophy of Law (Philosophy 338), The Ohio State University
Ancient Greek Philosophy (Philosophy 301), The Ohio State University
Philosophy of Religion (Philosophy 270), The Ohio State University
Symbolic Logic (Philosophy 250), University of Cincinnati and
The Ohio State University
Probability, Data, and Decision Making (Philosophy 153),
The Ohio State University
Logic (Philosophy 150), The Ohio State University
Introduction to Philosophy (Philosophy 101), The Ohio State University
Overview

This report covers my NMU Reassigned Time Award for the Winter term of 2011. During that term, I received a one-course class reduction; my colleague Sarah Jones taught the section of PL180: Fundamentals of Ethical Theory that I had been assigned to teach.

My Reassigned Time Award was incredibly beneficial for the advancement of my own research and writing; because of it, I was able to write a book chapter on the virtue of Patience and the corresponding vice of Wrath that will be included in an upcoming collection under contract with Oxford University Press on philosophical accounts of individual virtues and vices. Oxford University Press anticipates a full draft of the book to be completed in 2012, with publication to follow that year or the next. I did not seek outside grants during my term of reassigned time as the NMU grant provided the necessary time and funds to complete my chapter.

Results

Patience and Wrath are generally thought to be the virtue and vice with respect to anger. My work on this project is an extension of research I first undertook in my dissertation, where I developed a philosophical account of anger that I brought to bear on the problem of free will. For my chapter, I did additional research in empirical psychology and philosophical work on the virtues. Drawing on this research, I argued that virtue and vice in anger is determined by excellence or deficiency along three functions that anger serves in human psychology: appraisal, motivation, and communication.
While there has been some recent attention to angry virtue and vice in the philosophical literature, most contemporary accounts of virtue in anger allow angry virtue to be determined by *only one* of the three functions that anger serves. So, for example, Macalester Bell (2009) holds that virtue in anger is determined only by how appropriate someone’s anger is: essentially, does a person get very angry at significant injustices and less angry at minor slights? Others, like Lisa Tessman (2005), argue that virtue in anger is determined only by how motivated the angry person is to resist injustice and promote the flourishing of others.

In my chapter, I show that this focus on one function of anger to the exclusion of others fails to accurately characterize virtue in anger by using the examples of Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King, Jr. Both Douglass and King are thought to be exemplars of virtue, so their example helps me to demonstrate that virtue in anger requires both getting very angry at major injustices and at the same time being motivated to combat them. Douglass and King were both incensed by the treatment of blacks in the United States and were motivated to tirelessly oppose such treatment. So the proper account of virtue in anger requires attention to both anger’s appropriateness and the sort of motivations the angry person has. The examples of Douglass and King also help me emphasize that another important function of anger is communication: an excellently angry person urges others to become angry at injustice or wrongful conduct and tries to motivate them to resist the injustice or wrong, just as both Douglass and King did through powerful and inspiring speeches.

Part of the reason that Douglass and King are moral exemplars, then, is that they possessed excellence in anger with respect to appraisal, motivation, and communication.
Excellence along all three dimensions is constitutive of virtue in anger. Viciousness in anger, on the other hand, is characterized by excessiveness or deficiency along all three dimensions. For example, the wrathful person gets angry when it is inappropriate and is angrier than the situation warrants. He acts aggressively and impulsively toward others and is quick to communicate his excessive anger. The moral danger of wrath is thus moral overconfidence and moral insensitivity. The threat of the wrathful person’s anger often discourages others from legitimately challenging his authority. This can lead to him growing in overconfidence and insensitivity—wrath can thus enter into an increasingly vicious cycle with pride (Taylor 2006).

I am incredibly grateful for the Reassigned Time Award for providing me the time to advance my research outside the philosophical literature into current psychological research on the emotions. This was very helpful in grounding and advancing my philosophical thinking, and in helping to produce a chapter that, while maintaining its philosophical strength, also demonstrates a commitment to interdisciplinary thought and research. I was also able to use some of the fruits of my research to develop and offer a new class: Philosophy and Psychology of Emotion. I very much value the opportunity to share the fruits of my research with NMU students and I am committed to continuing to do so in the future.

Further Directions

While I continue to revise and revisit my thinking about vice and virtue with respect to anger, my philosophical and psychological research on anger and other emotions leads in several promising directions. Here I highlight just one. I am
particularly interested in exploring the connection between emotions like anger and certain moral concepts, like moral responsibility. My view is that we can understand more about moral responsibility and thereby have a greater appreciation of the conditions under which it is appropriate to hold people morally responsible if we have a greater understanding of emotions, like anger, that I believe help to shape our concept of moral responsibility. If anger has several different psychological functions, that should mean that moral responsibility is a concept with several functions as well. I hope to explore the implications of this thesis in future work.