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DIFFERENT SUBSTANTIVE CONCEPTIONS OF EVIL ACTIONS

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Introduction

All morally wrong actions deserve some form of moral condemnation. But the degree of that condemnation is not the same in all cases. Some wrongs are *so* morally extreme that they seem to belong to a different category because they deserve our very strongest form of moral condemnation. For example, telling a white lie to make a friend feel better might be morally wrong, but intuitively such an act is in a different moral category to the sadistic, brutal, and violent rape and torture of a child. The former act is merely wrong and not evil. In contrast, the latter act seems so morally extreme that we need to call it "evil" and not *merely* "wrong" if we are to do justice to the moral seriousness of that act and the strength of our condemnation of it. The task of a theory or substantive conception of evil is to spell out what is an evil action and how it differs from a merely wrongful action. But what does a plausible substantive theory of evil look like? To explore this question, I spell out the *concept* of evil and illustrate four different *types* of substantive *conceptions* of evil actions: victim, perpetrator, spectator, and mixed theories. Of these four options, I argue that mixed theories are the most plausible type of theory, before investigating in detail the promising mixed theory recently defended by Matthew Kramer (2014b). Finally, in light of my analysis of Kramer's view, I present a reformulated version of my *combination theory of evil* (Formosa 2008; Formosa 2013).

The concept of evil

The concept of an evil action that we are focusing on here is the concept of an action that is above and beyond mere moral wrongness because of its extreme moral gravity.[1] The job of a theory or a substantive conception of evil is to give an account of what exactly it is about evils that constitutes their extreme moral gravity and puts them in a separate moral category from lesser wrongs. Moral evil is thus a subset of moral wrongness. However, evil is not the only subset of moral wrongness in which we are interested. For example, crimes might be understood as that subset of moral wrongs that should be punished by the state. But evils and crimes are not the *same* subset of wrongs. While at least most evils (such as torture or rape) are crimes,[2] not all crimes are evil (such as fraud or theft). There are still further ways that we might carve up the broader category of moral wrongness. Perhaps, for example, we need the concept of a moral

wrong that is of such minor moral gravity that it is hardly worth condemning at all. So-called "white lies" would seem to fit into this subcategory. These different moral subcategories can be useful both as a moral shorthand and as a way of equipping us with precise moral language for properly expressing the appropriate type and strength of our moral condemnation of an action.

Evil is often thought to be the conceptual opposite of the good. But this is a mistake, at least as we are understanding the concept of evil here. If badness is the opposite of goodness, and wrongness is the opposite of rightness, then the opposite of an evil act is (roughly) that of a morally supererogatory act. A morally supererogatory act is an act that goes above and beyond the call of moral duty (Urmson 1958). It is good, but not required.[3] For example, it might be morally good and even morally required to help someone in desperate need when it will cost us little of moral importance (Singer 1972). However, when it will cost us our life to help an unknown stranger in need, such an act of sacrifice seems supererogatory as it goes above and beyond the call of moral duty. If supererogatory acts constitute an extreme form of moral rightness (or goodness), then evil acts constitute an extreme form of moral wrongness (or badness). For example, it might be morally wrong to rob an unconscious stranger of his money, but it is evil to rob him of his money and then poke his eyes out and chop off his fingers for the fun of it. This example shows us that evil acts go beyond mere wrongdoing in a way that is analogous to the way in which supererogatory acts go beyond mere rightdoing.[4]

Four types of conceptions of evil actions

At the highest level, theories of evil action are either act-first or character-first views. Act-first views *start* with a conception of evil actions and then define evil persons in terms of that. For example, an evil act might be one that sadistically inflicts great harm on others, and an evil person is a person who is habitually disposed to perform evil actions under autonomy promoting conditions (see Russell 2014: 173). In contrast, character-first views *start* with a conception of evil persons and then define evil actions in terms of that. For example, an evil person might be a person with extreme vices, such as extreme cruelty, and an evil action is one that only an evil person will characteristically perform (see Barry 2013). We shall focus here only on act-first conceptions because these are the most common type of view and it allows us to set out a theory of evil actions, which is our focus here, without first having to spell out a theory of evil persons. We can divide different substantive act-first conceptions of evil actions into (at least) the following four categories: victim, perpetrator, spectator, and mixed views. What makes these different *kinds* of views are that they each take a different position on what *type* of factor or factors transform a mere wrong into an evil.

According to *victim* conceptions (e.g., Adams and Balfour 2001: 19; Card 2002: 3), it is something about the extreme type or degree of harm or disrespect that victims suffer that *alone* is sufficient for transforming mere wrongs into evils. For example, what transforms a mere wrong into an evil might be that the victim of that wrong suffers a life-wrecking harm such as torture or life-ending harm such as murder (see Formosa 2008). Since it seems at least part of what horrifies us about evil actions is how much damage they tend to do to their victims, this focus on the harm done to victims has *prima facie* appeal. However, victim conceptions suffer from the following counterexample. Assume that I act wrongly by failing to take due care when holding a loaded gun. While acting wrongly in this way I slip over. This causes the gun in my hand to go off and kill my friend who is standing next to me. While I have clearly inflicted a great life-ending harm through a wrongful action, my action doesn't intuitively seem to be *evil*. This example suggests, *contra* victim views, that the harm done to victims alone is not a sufficient condition for transforming a wrong into an evil.

According to *perpetrator* conceptions (e.g., Garrard 1998: 53–4; Midgley 1984: 22–4; Morton 2004: 57), it is something about the morally extreme motivations, manners or responses of perpetrators that *alone* is sufficient for transforming mere wrongs into evils. For example, what transforms a mere wrong into an evil might be that the perpetrator of that wrong is motivated by sadism, acts in a cold-hearted manner, and experiences no immediate remorse. Since it seems at least part of what horrifies us about evil actions is the morally heinous motives, manners, and responses that perpetrators of evil tend to have, this focus on the perpetrator's reprehensible psychological states has *prima facie* appeal. However, perpetrator views suffer from the following counterexample. Imagine someone who, from the most sadistic motives possible, very mildly, but wrongly, insults a bus driver in a cold-hearted manner to make him feel a little bad about himself for a few seconds, and who never feels any remorse about doing so (see Russell 2007: 676). Although the action here is wrong and the perpetrator's motive and response are morally heinous, given that the harm involved here is so very minor (i.e., getting the bus driver to feel bad about himself for a few seconds), we would not intuitively judge the act to be evil. Acts such as this are both wrong and motivated in morally heinous ways and yet they don't seem to be evil. This example suggests, *contra* perpetrator views, that the perpetrator's reprehensible psychological states alone are not sufficient for transforming a wrong into an evil. What is missing in such cases is significant harm, which seems to suggest that significant harm is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a wrong to become an evil.[5]

According to *spectator* (or audience-response) conceptions, it is something about the response of spectators or judges of an act, typically their horror and incomprehension, that *alone* is sufficient for transforming a mere wrong into an evil. For example, what transforms a mere wrong into an evil might be the utter moral incomprehension that is provoked by our contemplation as spectators of a wrongful act (see de Wijze 2002; Russell 2014). Given that it seems at least part of what makes an evil act evil is the horror and incomprehension that such acts tend to produce in us, since we cannot understand how anyone could act that badly, this focus on spectator response has *prima facie* appeal. However, spectator views suffer from two kinds of counterexamples. First, assume that it is morally wrong to eat the most disgusting-looking bug that you can imagine (because the bug is endangered or belongs to someone else) and that if we were to contemplate this act as spectators it would provoke utter moral incomprehension or horror in us (for a similar example see Russell 2014: 60). We simply can't understand how someone could do such a disgusting and bizarre wrongful act. Nonetheless, such an act doesn't seem intuitively to be evil. This first example suggests, *contra* spectator views, that negative spectator responses of incomprehension are not sufficient for transforming a wrong act into an evil. Second, assume that the extreme and malicious torture of a suspected terrorist for fun is wrong and that if we were to contemplate this torture as spectators it wouldn't provoke moral incomprehension or horror in us since we care very little about terrorists. Nonetheless, such an act may intuitively be evil. This second example suggests, *contra* spectator views, that negative spectator responses are also not necessary for transforming a wrong act into an evil. Our spectator responses of moral incomprehension and horror are at best semi-reliable epistemological indicators of, or responses to, the presence of evil actions, rather than essential features of evil actions themselves.

According to *mixed* conceptions (e.g., Calder 2013; Formosa 2008; Kekes 2005: 2; Vetlesen 2005: 21) it is some *mixture* of *victim, perpetrator*, and *spectator* components that are *together* sufficient for transforming a mere wrong into an evil. For example, what transforms a mere wrong into an evil action might be that the perpetrator of that wrong is motivated by sadism *and* the victim of that wrong suffers a great harm.[6] Mixed views are appealing because by requiring both harm *and* malicious motivation they can avoid the obvious counterexamples examined earlier that cause problems for other types of views. This includes cases of: wrongs involving

great harms that are not evil because they are not maliciously motivated (such as mild reckless-ness in handling a gun that causes death); wrongs involving very malicious motivation that are not evil because they are not very harmful (such as maliciously motivated but very minor insults of bus drivers); wrongs that cause incomprehension in spectators (such as bizarre bug-eating behavior) without being evil because they are neither very harmful nor maliciously motivated; and wrongs that fail to cause incomprehension in spectators (such as the malicious torture of a terrorist for fun) despite being evil since they are both very harmful and maliciously motivated. Given that mixed views can avoid these important counterexamples, they seem to be the most promising type of substantive conception of evil actions.[7] Since they are the most promising type of view, we shall now examine in detail as an example the mixed theory recently defended by Kramer (2014a; 2014b).[8]

Kramer's mixed theory of evil actions

For Kramer (2014b: 49), an evil act (or what he calls "evil conduct") is conduct "underlain by sadistic malice or heartlessness or extreme recklessness that is connected to severe harm in the absence of any significant extenuating circumstances." Kramer's act-first theory of evil actions is a mixed view because it includes both victim and perpetrator components. While Kramer (2014b: 51) mentions the "shuddersomeness" of our typical response to evil, he does not include a spectator component as a necessary feature of evil actions.

For Kramer (2014b: 50), an evil act is brought about by one of three states of mind: sadistic malice, heartlessness, or recklessness. Negligence is not one of those states of mind. A per-petrator with one of these three states of mind must be appropriately connected to a severe harm. This raises two questions: what is an appropriate connection and what is a severe harm? Harm forms a continuum. There are clear cases where a harm is severe (such as torture) and clear cases where it is not (such as a soft kick in the shins). Consequently, there will be borderline cases where it is unclear whether an act is evil or not since there is vagueness around whether the harm is sufficiently severe. Nonetheless, Kramer (2014b: 73–84) rejects views, such as those held by de Wijze (2002), Garrard (2002), and Morton (2004), that hold that an appropriate connection to a great or serious harm is not necessary for an act to be evil.[9] The appropriate connection between a severe harm and the above three states of mind includes: directly wanting, intending, and desiring a great harm; failed attempts to bring about a great harm; realized and unrealized reckless risks of great harms; being in some way morally respon-sible for a great harm, such as by working in a factory that produces ammunitions used in war crimes; or being voyeuristically linked via spectatorial pleasure to a great harm (Kramer 2014b: 65–73). When one of the three listed culpable frames of mind is appropriately connected to a severe harm, then the action is evil, otherwise it is not evil.

There are many appealing features of Kramer's theory. It includes both harm and perpetrator components, tries to list all the culpable states of mind that underlie evil, and spells out clearly the different ways that an evildoer can be morally linked to a great harm. Further, by accepting that harm is a continuum, the view can say that some evils are worse than others, although all evils are very morally serious because they involve a culpable frame of mind appropriately con-nected to a great harm. Nonetheless, despite these positives, there are several issues that arise for this view. We shall focus on two of these here.

The first issue is whether Kramer is right that acts of recklessness but not acts of negligence can count as evil. What is the difference between the two? "Both negligent conduct and reck-less conduct give rise to risks, but the risks engendered by the former are inadvertent whereas the risks engendered by the latter are knowingly hazarded" (Kramer 2014b: 64). On Kramer's

account, negligence is risking a harm *unknowingly*, whereas recklessness is risking a harm *knowingly*. To be *knowingly* hazarded, the harm must be foreseen and not merely reasonably foreseeable. A lack of knowing about or foreseeing harms can therefore turn what would otherwise be recklessness into negligence.

But sometimes negligent acts can be evil. For example, imagine that I decide to drop a nuclear bomb on an island to test it. As far as I know no one lives there, but I do nothing to find out for sure. In fact, thousands of people live there and, while this fact is widely known, I am totally ignorant of it. When I test my bomb, I kill half of the island's inhabitants right away and the other half die slow and horrifically agonizing deaths over the next few weeks. However, dropping a nuclear bomb on the island seems to be negligent rather than reckless since I don't *knowingly* hazard harms to anyone. This amounts to culpable negligence, given that I surely had a duty to check whether anyone lived there before testing my bomb. Nonetheless, even though my connection to a severe harm in this case is a form of culpable negligence and not recklessness, it seems that my act still counts as evil. The extreme reprehensibility of my negligence in not even bothering to find out whether a harm to persons would be hazarded by such conduct, combined with the staggering amount of harm inflicted on thousands of people, is in combination reprehensible enough to make my act evil. If that intuition is right, then negligence can be an appropriate connection between a harm and a perpetrator in the case of some evils.

The second and more important worry focuses on the perpetrator component of Kramer's theory. One of the most important problems faced by both perpetrator views and mixed views with perpetrator components is the difficulty of pinning down *exactly which* states of mind in the perpetrator are necessary for making an act evil. The simplest perpetrator component says that there is only one state of mind that is necessary. That state of mind might be described either in terms of the *presence* of a particular motive, such as sadism, or the *absence* of a particular state of mind, such as psychological barriers to harming others that ought to have been there (see Midgley 1984: 22–4; Morton 2004: 57). Such views face the problem that the single listed state of mind doesn't seem to be necessary as it is not the *only* state of mind that can make an act evil. For example, while some evils are motivated by sadism or occur without the presence of psychological barriers to harming others, not all evils are motivated in this way. Some evils result from heartlessness rather than sadism and other evils result from willfully ignoring barriers to violence that are present. The solution to this problem that Kramer adopts is to replace a single state of mind with a *list* of exactly three states of mind – sadism, heartlessness, and recklessness – that can result in evil.

The obvious worry with a list approach is that it seems ad hoc and incomplete. In an earlier paper I argued that:

> Motives such as envy, malice, greed, hatred, boredom, honor, pride, revenge, ambition, thoughtlessness, a lack of self-esteem, ideology, and faith can all, at times, be roots of evil. . . . Philosophers who think that there is a single root of all evil, be it money, pride or a lack of self-esteem, are simply suffering from the effects of a poverty of examples.
>
> *(Formosa 2008: 220)*

It will be extremely difficult for a list approach to handle the fact that people can perpetrate evils from all these sorts of motives and likely many more as well. Can Kramer's view accommodate this full range of motives? To see if he can, we need to look at how Kramer understands sadism and heartlessness. A person "motivated by sadistic malice . . . derives pleasure

(usually involving thrilled excitement) from somebody else's suffering" (Kramer 2014b: 50). Heartlessness is a "frame of mind" that involves regarding other people's "woes as instrumentally gratifying (rather than as inherently gratifying [as sadism does])" (Kramer 2014b: 52). But can we really place *all* motives for perpetrating evils (that don't involve mere recklessness) under one of these two states of mind?[10]

Consider the following example. Jack is in an outlaw motorcycle gang and he murders his best friend and fellow gang member Mack because he correctly believes that Mack has killed his wife. However, Jack could have gone to the police and, if he had done so, Mack would have been arrested and sentenced to life in prison. But Jack doesn't go to the police, since he thinks that would show his fellow gang members that he was weak. Instead, Jack deceptively lures Mack to his death and shoots him in cold blood in front of all of Mack's family to get his revenge. He then uses his knife to cut the gang tattooed skin off Mack's back while Mack's family look on with horror and plead with him to stop. He ignores their pleas and finishes cutting off the tattooed skin in stony silence. In committing this bloody deed, Jack is motivated by revenge and by wanting to send a message to Mack's family and his fellow gang members. Jack doesn't relish his task or take pleasure in cutting the tattooed skin off Mack's back. But he doesn't shy away from it either.

Can Kramer's list approach deal with this example? Jack's murder of Mack is intentional, so it is clearly not a case of recklessness, and Jack's actions are not sadistically motivated, since he gets no pleasure from the harm he inflicts. But Jack's action doesn't seem to be a case of heartlessness either. Jack does not regard Mack's woes, or the terror he inflicts on Mack's family, to be instrumentally or intrinsically gratifying. He feels he must revenge himself against Mack and send a message to Mack's family and his fellow gang members, and does so through his actions, but he regards the harm he causes as necessary and not gratifying. Nonetheless, Jack does not have twinges of regret either. He knows what he has to do, and he does it coldly and methodically. Jack's bloody and violent act of revenge seems to be an example of an evil action. He kills his best friend in cold blood and cuts the skin off his back in front of Mack's family when he had the option to go to the police and receive justice. But Jack's act is not sadistic, heartless, or reckless. Yet his bloody and gruesome act of revenge still seems to be evil. This is a problem for Kramer's view in particular and for list approaches in general. There are *many* motivating states of mind that when properly connected to great harms can make an act evil, but these many states of mind can't all be reduced to a short list.

In everyday talk, acting from malice is different to acting from envy, which in turn is different to acting from hatred, ingratitude, fear, disgust, dislike, boredom, revengefulness, pride, or a desire to intimidate (and so on). Kramer's theory needs to reduce *all* these motives (and many more as well) for intentionally (i.e., not recklessly) inflicting severe harm on others to just two categories: sadism (when it gives rise to pleasure) or heartlessness (when it doesn't give rise to pleasure). But what about someone who, for example, acts from anger or fear and gets no pleasure from the severe harm they inflict? Since these can't be cases of sadism (as there is no pleasure), it follows that acting from anger or fear must count for Kramer as heartlessness. But surely acting out of anger or fear is not the same thing as acting out of heartlessness. Nonetheless, someone who horribly tortures someone out of anger or fear might still be perpetrating evil (depending on the details), even if they are not heartless, sadistic or reckless. As such, Kramer's attempt to limit the states of mind that can lead to evil to a list of three is too narrow and too restrictive. One solution to this problem is to expand Kramer's list. If not three, then maybe there are just four or five states of mind that can lead to evil? But whatever list we develop for this purpose will most likely be either incomplete or ad hoc. I present a better option in the next section.

Formosa's combination theory of evil

In this section I present a modified version of my own substantive mixed view (Formosa 2008; 2013), which I call the *combination theory of evil*. We can start with a preliminary rendering of this theory which says: *an evil act is a morally wrong act in which a perpetrator acts very badly by being appropriately connected to a very serious harm*. This rendering is preliminary since it fails to explain what counts as the perpetrator acting very badly, what makes a harm very serious, and what an appropriate connection is between the perpetrator and the harm. Nonetheless, this preliminary version clearly sets out the three essential elements of a plausible mixed substantive theory of evil: a perpetrator component, a victim harm component, and an account of the appropriate connection between the two. Note that this theory (like Kramer's) lacks a spectator component. This is because, as argued above, our spectator responses of incomprehension and horror are best understood as imperfect epistemological guides or appropriate responses to the presence of evils, rather than constitutive features of evil acts themselves.

The revised theory, based on Formosa (2013: 245), builds on this preliminary rendering by adding enough detail to pitch the theory at the right level of generality. The revisions incorporated into the theory here are based, in part, on the preceding analysis of Kramer's view.[11] According to the *combination theory of evil, an evil act is a morally wrong act in which*:
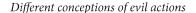
1   *a perpetrator acts very badly* – where "acting very badly" is determined by the combined relative severity of at least the following five scalar properties: reprehensibility of the motive; the degree and type of harm; the directness of the connection to the harm; the reprehensibility of the perpetrator's affective responses; and how effectively the harm is realized;

2   *and a victim or victims suffer what would at least normally be a very significant harm* – where a very significant harm is one that is life-ending, life-wrecking or significantly autonomy impairing, or in some other way very serious (such as significantly undermining well-being or involving the expression of very extreme forms of disrespect);

3   *and the perpetrator is appropriately connected to the harm done to a victim or victims* – where the connection is appropriate if the perpetrator intends the harm (whether or not the intention succeeds); or acts recklessly in knowingly risking a likely harm (whether or not the harm eventuates); or acts negligently in risking a reasonably foreseeable but unforeseen harm (whether or not the harm eventuates); or acts in some other way such that they are at least partially morally responsible for the harm; or takes voyeuristic pleasure in the harm.

For a wrongful act to count as evil, all three components must be jointly satisfied. While this view is complex, it is arguably pitched at the right level of complexity. Given that evil is a complex phenomenon, a theory of evil needs to be similarly complex. We shall now look in more detail at the three elements of this theory in reverse order.

The third component holds that a necessary feature of an evil act is that the perpetrator is appropriately connected to a harm. The perpetrator can be appropriately connected to a harm by intending it, recklessly or negligently risking it, being in some other way morally responsible for it,[12] or voyeuristically enjoying it. With this component of the theory I follow Kramer's account closely, with the main departure being the addition of negligence as a possible appropriate connection. I have already justified this addition above with the example of the negligent nuclear bomber. In such cases, if the negligence is especially egregious and the harm is very great and easily foreseeable, even if not foreseen or known about, the act *may* still be evil (depending on the victim and perpetrator components). The other important change here is that I don't follow Kramer in listing recklessness as an underlying state of mind in the perpetrator. This is a

mistake because recklessness is not usually a motive in the same way that sadism and heartlessness are motives. Instead, recklessly risking harm is better understood as an appropriate connector between a perpetrator and a harm, along with intending, negligently risking, being morally responsible for, or voyeuristically enjoying. Further, in this revised version I have explicitly added voyeurism as an appropriate connection, rather than include voyeurism as an instance of moral responsibility as I did previously, since a voyeur might enjoy a harm without being even partially morally responsible for that harm. Finally, the harm the perpetrator is appropriately connected to does not need to eventuate for the act to be evil. For example, a failed attempt to intentionally kill a group of toddlers for fun that is foiled because the perpetrator slips over at the last moment could still count as an evil action even though the harm isn't realized.

The second component holds that it is a necessary feature of an evil act that a perpetrator is appropriately connected to a victim suffering what would at least normally be a very significant harm. A very significant harm is either life-ending as it kills its victim, such as murder, or it is not. If it is not life-ending, to count as a very significant harm it will often have to be a life-wrecking or significantly autonomy impairing harm, such as torture or rape. These sorts of harms tend to permanently scar their victims, wreck their lives, and significantly impair their autonomy (see Formosa 2013). But not every very significant harm is significant in the same way. Other cases, such as the extreme torture of babies or kittens, are very significant harms, even if they don't impact negatively on nonexistent autonomy competences or induce trauma, because they significantly undermine well-being or involve the expression of very extreme forms of disrespect.[13] Since these harms are spelled out primarily in terms of the impacts that they have on the lives of victims, to account for super-resilient victims we need to add the clause that the harm would at least normally have these life-wrecking effects. If extreme torture normally has life-wrecking impacts on its victim, it still constitutes a significant harm to use extreme torture against a super-resilient victim on whom it doesn't have the usual life-wrecking impacts.

The perpetrator component holds that it is a necessary feature of an evil act that a perpetrator acts very badly in being appropriately connected to what would at least normally be a very significant harm. The complexity of this third component mirrors the complexity of the motivating states that can lead to evil and the myriad ways in which a perpetrator can act very badly. As I argue above against Kramer's view, we cannot reduce the underlying psychological states that can lead to evil to one item or a short list of items, such as sadism or heartlessness. Nonetheless, the badness of the perpetrator's psychological states is a necessary feature of evil acts. But how else, other than developing a longer list, can we deal with this complexity? My proposal is a multifactorial account that focuses on the relative degree of five factors of differing importance. These five factors are listed below in roughly decreasing order of importance.

1. *Reprehensibility of the motive*: all else being equal, the more reprehensible the motive, the more likely the act is evil. Focusing on the reprehensibility of the motive, rather than trying to name all relevant reprehensible motives, allows the view to avoid the problem faced by single item or list accounts of being unable to account for the rich diversity of evil-inducing motives. We can judge the reprehensibility of the motive in terms of what it says about the perpetrator's attitudes toward the dignity (or autonomy) and well-being of his or her victim or victims. For example, sadism is a highly reprehensible motive as it takes the pain and suffering of others to be positively valued and pleasurable. Anger, in contrast, is a comparatively less reprehensible motive as it need not express the attitude that the autonomy or well-being of others is completely worthless. Highly reprehensible motives are more likely to be present where a harm is directly intended, and less likely to be present when a harm is risked by, or the result of, recklessness or negligence. When I intend to harm another, I am (usually) regarding that harm as inherently or instrumentally valuable, thereby making the motive (whatever it is) highly

reprehensible. In contrast, when I am reckless or negligent I am more likely to be merely giving the risked harm insufficient consideration, which is usually less reprehensible than positively valuing the harm. Nonetheless, the greater the recklessness or negligence displayed, the more reprehensible the motive, as the consideration given to others becomes comparatively less. The more reprehensible the motive is, the worse the perpetrator acts.

2. *Directness of the connection to the harm*: all else being equal, the more directly the perpetrator is connected to the harm, the more likely the act is evil. The link to the harm is more direct if the perpetrator intends the harm for its own sake and less direct if it results from recklessness and even less direct again if it results from negligence. Voyeurism is also less direct than intending the harm. The more direct the connection is between the harm and the perpetrator's psychological state, the worse the perpetrator acts.

3. *Degree and type of harm*: all else being equal, the greater the degree and type of harm the perpetrator is appropriately connected to, the more likely the act is evil. All evils involve an appropriate connection to a very serious harm. But harm is a continuum and above the vague threshold of a very serious harm, even more harm is possible. The more harm that the perpetrator is appropriately connected to, the worse the perpetrator acts.

4. *Reprehensibility of the perpetrator's affective responses*: all else being equal, the more reprehensible the perpetrator's affective responses to the harm that they are appropriately connected to, the more likely the act is evil. Pleasure in the infliction of harm is more reprehensible than not being moved at all, which in turn is more reprehensible than regret and sorrow. The more reprehensible the perpetrator's affective responses are to the harm that they are appropriately connected to, the worse the perpetrator acts.

5. *How effectively the harm is realized*: all else being equal, the more effectively the harm that the perpetrator is appropriately connected to is realized, the more likely the act is evil. Not all intentions to inflict harm are fully realized. Some intentions fail, such as when the perpetrator slips over allowing the victim to get away. The more fully that intentions to harm others are realized, and thus the more harm that is actually inflicted, the more likely the act is evil. Likewise, not every serious harm risked by wrongful recklessness and negligence eventuates. The more risked harm that eventuates, the more likely the act is evil, all else being equal. This is because realized harms are often semi-reliable indicators of a greater perseverance and commitment to carrying out intentions to harm (e.g., the perpetrator gets up and tries again after they slip over), or of higher degrees of recklessness or negligence, or of a more perverse form of voyeurism.

Paradigmatic and uncontroversial cases of evil will tend to involve harms that are clearly very serious *and* a perpetrator who acts badly in all or most of these five ways by scoring highly on each scale. In contrast, borderline and controversial cases of evil will tend to involve harms that are not clearly very serious *or* perpetrators who score lowly on some or all five scales. For example, imagine a perpetrator of a wrong who intentionally tortures and horribly disfigures ten women for the sadistic pleasure of it and who laughs about it afterwards. Here we have a wrong act in which the perpetrator is appropriately connected to a very serious harm. But does he also act very badly? He does indeed, since he scores highly on all five perpetrator scales: his motive, sadism, is highly reprehensible; he directly intends the harm; the degree and type of harm he intends is extremely serious; the perpetrator's affective response of laughter is highly reprehensible; and the intended harm is fully realized. In combination the presence of these multiple factors to a high degree, together with an appropriate connection to life-wrecking harms, makes the act a clear-cut case of evil.

In contrast, imagine a perpetrator who acts wrongly in recklessly causing a woman to lose her leg by losing control of his car while speeding very slightly to get to an important meeting.

Afterwards the perpetrator is shattered and remorseful and he never drives again. Here we have a wrong act in which the perpetrator is appropriately connected to a very serious harm (i.e., the loss of a woman's leg). But does the perpetrator also act very badly? Not badly enough to make the act evil since he scores lowly on most of the five perpetrator scales: his motive, speeding very slightly to get to an important meeting on time, is not highly reprehensible; he is not very directly related to the harm since it results from his recklessness; the degree and type of harm that results is probably not far above the threshold for a very serious harm; the perpetrator's affective response is not at all reprehensible; and the harm his wrongful recklessness likely risks is only partly realized (i.e., no one died, as they could have, since he swerved to try to miss the woman). In combination, these multiple factors make the act a clear-cut case of an act that, despite the appropriate connection to a serious harm, is merely wrong and not evil.

While there are many clear-cut examples of evils and many clear-cut examples of mere wrongs, there are also many cases that genuinely seem to be borderline cases of evil. They are borderline either because it is borderline whether the harm involved is very serious or because it is borderline whether the perpetrator is acting very badly. It is borderline whether the perpetrator is acting very badly when the perpetrator scores highly on some of the five perpetrator scales but lowly to middling on others (e.g., he has a highly reprehensible motive but very nonreprehensible affective responses) or scores middling to lowly on all five scales. In such cases, it is unclear whether there are enough relevant perpetrator factors present to a high enough degree to make the act evil. When this happens, it might be reasonable to reach different judgments about whether the act in question is evil or not and any judgments reached in this regard will need to be tentative. Thus, to its merit, the *combination theory of evil* can make sense of *why* borderline cases of evil are borderline and *why* clear-cut cases of evil are clear-cut, while still leaving sufficient room for the work of judgment to respond to the specificity of each case.

Conclusion

I started this paper by outlining four different types of act-first substantive theories of evil actions: *victim, perpetrator, spectator*, and *mixed* theories. Of these four types, I argued that mixed theories are the most promising. To demonstrate this promise, I examined in detail the strengths and weaknesses of Kramer's (2014b) mixed theory. Building on this critical analysis, I presented a revised version of my *combination theory of evil*. According to this theory, when we judge an act to be evil, we are saying that the action deserves our strongest form of moral condemnation because it involves a perpetrator acting very badly in being appropriately connected to a very serious harm.

Notes

1 There are other *concepts* of evil besides this one. In Formosa (2013) I call these other concepts of evil the concept of an *evil-w* action, according to which an evil action is another name for a wrong action, and an *evil-b* action (or event), according to which an evil action or event is another name for badness in general.
2 Small-scale acts of extreme and sadistic humiliation might be examples of acts that are evil but are not crimes.
3 Whether there is such a class of actions, how we should define them, and whether a moral theory needs to be able to accommodate them, are all much debated issues. See Baron (2015).
4 The claim that evil *acts* are the perverse mirror image of supererogatory acts has clear similarities to the much discussed "mirror thesis," which is the claim that evil *persons* are the perverse mirror image of moral saints. See Barry (2013), Haybron (2002), and Russell (2014).

5 Advocates of the possibility of small-scale evil, such as de Wijze (2018), do not seem to feel the intuitive pull of such examples and they consequently deny that significant harm is a necessary feature of evil acts.

6 Given that I have just argued against the inclusion of a *spectator* component in a plausible theory of evil, I won't include a spectator component in my example of a *mixed* view.

7 Of course, mixed views still face questions of their own, such as how much harm is necessary for an action to count as evil and what types of motivations underwrite evil actions. We return to these issues below.

8 There are several other similarly plausible mixed views, such as Calder (2013), that we cannot examine here for reasons of space.

9 I share Kramer's rejection of such views – for further defense see Formosa (2013).

10 We can ignore recklessness here since sadism and heartlessness are the only relevant states of mind when we are focusing on *intentional* harm.

11 The main revisions are: (1) to significantly modify the connection component in light of Kramer's work; and (2) to spell out more clearly the perpetrator component of the view. The harm component of the view stays more or less the same.

12 Kramer (2014b: 70–71) discusses a case in which someone has a small part in a big harm, such as aiding genocide by working in a Nazi munitions factory. In this case, the best way to think of the connection between the act and the harm is in terms of partial moral responsibility for a collective harm, rather than in terms of intention, recklessness, negligence, or voyeurism.

13 There may be still other ways in which a harm could be very significant. For example, perhaps (as some of my students have suggested) extreme cultural harms, such as the wanton destruction of very significant cultural artifacts or artworks for ideological reasons, might count as very significant harms.

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