

Contempt as a Moral Attitude

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Contempt as a Moral Attitude*

Michelle Mason

I. INTRODUCTION

It is a common lament that moral philosophers often deny, misdescribe, or simply overlook significant features of the ethical landscape as everyday agents perceive it. Contemporary moral philosophers, sensitive to the charge, have increasingly taken up questions of moral psychology and moral emotion they might otherwise have neglected. For all the improvement, however, the cast of characters on offer in contemporary moral philosophy and the attitudinal repertoire they command remains, to my mind, fairly uninspired if not uninspiring. Indeed, it may well be the moral philosophers' concern to inspire us that accounts for omissions we might otherwise attribute, on a less charitable hypothesis, to mere lack of imagination.

Among the perhaps uninspiring attitudes that contemporary moral philosophers largely have continued to neglect is that which I take as my focus in what follows: contempt.¹ I focus on contempt not only to

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1. To my knowledge, the only contemporary philosophical works to contain more than a passing reference to contempt are Thomas E. Hill, Jr.'s "Basic Respect and Cultural Diversity" and "Must Respect Be Earned?" chaps. 3 and 4 in his *Respect, Pluralism, and Justice: Kantian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Robert C. Solomon's *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993); and Richard B. Brandt, "Moral Valuation," *Ethics* 56 (1946): 106–21. In Solomon, the discussion is confined to an entry in the "emotional register" in chap. 8 of the book. Brandt is one of the few moral philosophers to recognize the moral role of contempt. His primary concern

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note that it plays a larger role in ethical life than a survey of the recent ethics literature suggests but, more significantly, to argue for its recognition as a specifically moral attitude—moral both in the sense that it is an attitude possessing moral content and in the sense that it can be, in what I dub its *properly focused* form, a morally justified attitude to take toward another. On such a view, contempt in its properly focused form is a feature of the everyday ethical landscape that the moral philosopher lacks excuse for ignoring and invites challenge for discrediting. It is in the spirit of such a challenge that I offer the following defense of the moral propriety of properly focused contempt.

My defense takes the following route: in Section II, I introduce an example to illuminate the attitude I mean to take up; in Section III, I rely on a comparison with resentment to sketch the conditions under which an instance of contempt is evidentially appropriate to its object, what I call conditions for contempt's proper focus; because contempt can be properly focused without at the same time being a morally appropriate response, I mine some moral objections for further conditions of contempt's moral justification in Section IV; I turn in Section V to further objections to contempt and, in Sections VI and VII, to some specifically Kantian worries; I ultimately argue that neither these nor the other objections I consider block my argument that properly focused contempt is sometimes morally justifiable.² I conclude by noting some considerations that arguably speak in favor of the stronger conclusion that properly focused contempt may in some cases be morally required.

is to locate "contemptible" among other evaluative adjectives related to emotions or attitudes. He regards the class of evaluative adjectives of which "contemptible" is a member as being of special interest insofar as its members characterize the most fundamental of our moral evaluations. Brandt suggests that contemptible actions or persons "have the character of having done harm to someone in such a way as to mark them as small, low, or inferior" and understands the emotion of contempt to be "directed toward someone for some reason judged inferior and noxious" (Brandt, p. 115). I am sympathetic to Brandt's view, though (as will become apparent) I deny the connection it posits between contempt and harm to another person. I discuss the views of Hill, who expresses skepticism concerning contempt's moral propriety, below. One also finds passing references to contempt in John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), sec. 73; Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), chap. 7; Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), chap. 4; Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 13, chap. 1.4, and p. 203; Joel Feinberg, "Justice and Personal Desert," in his *Doing and Deserving* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 55–94; and Aurel Kolnai, "The Standard Modes of Aversion: Fear, Disgust, and Hatred," *Mind* 107 (1998): 581–95, p. 583. If I am correct, the role of contempt in the ethical domain is more important than these passing references suggest.

2. My defense of the moral propriety of properly focused contempt, then, proceeds negatively by meeting objections to the contrary. On such a strategy, of course, the defense is always vulnerable to new objections. Here I consider those that appear most compelling.

If my defense of contempt persuades, it presents a dual challenge for contemporary moral theory: a general challenge to the view that an enlightened morality must be a gentle morality and, more specifically, a challenge to moral theories unable (or unwilling) to accommodate the ethical role of properly focused contempt.³

II. CAMILLE'S CONTEMPT

I begin with a scene from a marriage. Camille's contempt for Paul, her husband, is palpable. She shuns his advances and generally has withdrawn herself from him. Paul senses that something has changed in his relationship with his wife, and for the worst. Camille, however, refuses to explain herself. Unbeknownst to Paul, ever since he agreed to write a screenplay for the egomaniacal film producer, Prokosch, he has revealed himself to be, in Camille's eyes, not much of a man. What strikes Camille is not only that Paul has compromised his artistic integrity in pursuit of the mighty dollar but that Paul's pursuit has, at best, blinded him to Prokosch's designs on her and, at worst, revealed Paul to be a willing facilitator of Prokosch's seduction of his wife. In this context, we can surmise, Camille's silence is strategic. She leaves it to Paul to recognize his failure for what it is; if he reveals himself blind to it, so much the worse her judgment of him.

Camille and Paul are characters in a film by Jean-Luc Godard titled, conveniently for my purpose, *Le mépris*.⁴ The film recounts the evolving contempt that Camille (Brigitte Bardot) comes to feel for her playwright husband Paul (Michel Piccoli). At the film's beginning, Camille and Paul appear deeply in love. However, the arrival of the lecherous American film producer Jeremiah Prokosch (Jack Palance) threatens their bliss. That the wealthy Prokosch plans a conquest of Camille is clear. For example, when Paul asks why Prokosch wants to hire him to adapt Homer's *Odyssey* for the screen, Prokosch responds, "You need the money." Prokosch adds, in response to a puzzled Paul, "I hear you have a beautiful wife." In light of this ominous introduction, a number of Paul's subsequent actions seem subtle encouragements of Prokosch's sexual advances toward Camille, encouragements that appear designed to keep Paul in the producer's favor. Thus, when Prokosch invites the

3. For a discussion of the worry that on some philosophers' views, morality is an intrinsically cruel institution and a subsequent defense of Hume's promise for a "gentle" morality, see Annette Baier, "Moralism and Cruelty: Reflections on Hume and Kant," *Ethics* 103 (1993): 436–57. I would deny that the contempt I defend falls victim to Baier's charge of cruelty. In any case, "gentleness" is not an exclusive alternative to cruelty. Just punishment, e.g., may fail to qualify as gentle without thereby deserving rejection as cruel.

4. Jean-Luc Godard's 1963 film is based on the novel *Il disprezzo* by Alberto Moravia (Milan: Bompiani, 1954); in English translation, see *A Ghost at Noon*, trans. Angus Davidson (Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1973).

pair to his chalet, offering to let Camille ride next to him in his flashy red two-seater and advising Paul to take a cab, Paul encourages his wife, against her expressed wishes, to go. As it happens, Paul is delayed in arriving at the chalet and the subsequent *dénouement* suggests the scene of a seduction. Thus begins Camille's contempt, apparently in response to her judgment that Paul has ignored or encouraged Prokosch's behavior, revealing himself willing to barter her sexual services for his own professional advancement.

The action in *Le mépris* in fact is more ambiguous than my brief gloss suggests.⁵ For my purposes here, I want to suppose that Paul's motives are the objectionable ones that Camille apparently believes them to be and that Camille herself is not as unprincipled as Godard sometimes suggests.⁶ I will assume that we have before us, that is, a case of a husband's revealed lack of integrity and willingness to opportunistically exploit the intimate relationship he shares with his wife. We are to believe, moreover, that what is revealed manifests enduring qualities that speak to the kind of person he is. In response, his wife comes to regard him with contempt.

I am inclined to judge Camille's contempt for her husband not merely to be understandable but, if her beliefs are true, justified. Is it morally justified, however?⁷ If so, what are the relevant justifying con-

5. On a more nuanced reading, the film emerges as a tale of competing contempts—both fictional and real. Within the film, one also encounters the theme of the mutual contempt between the man of the world (Prokosch) and the man of art (Fritz Lang, playing himself as the director of Prokosch's production). Both in having Lang play himself and in putting in Prokosch's mouth a twist on a Nazi quotation ("Whenever I hear the word 'culture,'" reports Prokosch, "I reach for my checkbook"), Godard also establishes a connection between Prokosch and the real-life Nazi Goebbels, whose 1933 job offer to Lang met with Lang's rejection and subsequent flight into exile. (The quotation has been attributed both to Goebbels and to Goering.) Finally, a common interpretation of the film has Paul representing Godard; Camille standing in for Godard's first wife, Anna Karina; and Prokosch representing Joseph Levine, a film producer whom Godard is supposed to have regarded with true contempt and who, ironically, co-produced *Le mépris*.

6. Thus, I in no way intend my comments about the characters' behavior as a piece of film interpretation or criticism.

7. That philosophers have been insufficiently attentive to distinctions in the respects in which an emotion may be appropriate or justified is a charge Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson defend in "The Moralistic Fallacy: On the 'Appropriateness' of Emotions," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61 (July 2000): 65–90. In what follows, I ultimately am concerned with the conditions under which cases of contempt that are what D'Arms and Jacobson call "fitting" their object (cases given by what I refer to as the conditions for contempt's proper focus) are, furthermore, morally justified. Conditions of fittingness or proper focus and conditions of moral justification are largely independent. For example, although contempt may be fitting a person in virtue of evidence concerning his or her character, that is not sufficient to establish its moral propriety; there may exist overriding moral reasons that make it morally objectionable in the circumstances. Neither is fitting-

ditions? Despite what is in the film a tragic outcome that suggests, if anything, the kind of grief to which contempt might lead, I offer Camille's feelings as a starting point for probing beyond the view that contempt is something we always ought morally to expurgate and toward a defense of its moral justification. Although I have found nothing in contemporary moral theory that might vindicate Camille's response to her predicament, I regard this as more of an indictment of modern moral theory than of her.

III. WHAT IS PROPERLY FOCUSED CONTEMPT?

One who tends, as I do, to the charitable view that contemporary moral philosophers' relative neglect of contempt as a moral attitude is not due to a lack of imagination does well to acknowledge contempt's seedier side. Whereas attitudes such as respect, gratitude, love, humility, and forgiveness constitute the constellation of the nice, contempt comports exclusively with the nasty. Or so, I take it, most of us are initially prepared to suppose. If one further supposes that morality is to be inspiring, we have one explanation of why contempt so often goes by the board.⁸

ness a necessary condition for the moral propriety of an emotion. For example, moral considerations might make an attitude such as respect a morally appropriate response to a person despite the fact that there is nothing true of the person to suggest that they merit respect. Such appears to be Kant's position with regard to the respect that we are morally required to show even the vicious, this despite the fact that they are unworthy of it. On this last point, see Richard Dean, "What Should We Treat as an End in Itself?" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 77 (1996): 268–88. I further discuss Kantian concerns about respect as they bear on the moral propriety of contempt below.

8. The supposition of contempt's nastiness is shared by some of the most prominent of our modern moral philosophers. Kant, e.g., offers a quite vivid caution against the potential nastiness of contempt. His insistence that we recognize a duty to avoid being contemptuous of others (*Anderer verachten* [*contemnere*]), while primarily motivated by his account of priceless human dignity and the respect (*Achtung*) it merits, also suggests a graphic concern with the consequences to which contempt (*Verachtung*) might lead: "Disgraceful punishments that dishonor humanity itself (such as quartering a man, having him torn by dogs, cutting off his nose and ears)"; Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 255 (Ak. 463). Note that the relevant term here for Kant is *Verachtung*, which wears on its sleeve its incompatibility with Kantian respect (*Achtung*). I comment further on the tension between contempt and respect below. One might expect to find in philosophy's history philosophers more receptive than is Kant to contempt's defense. Nietzsche, e.g., appears aware of the importance of contempt in the domain of the moral. See *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), par. 10. However, Nietzsche ultimately suggests that the strong will not experience contempt because they do not take others seriously enough to warrant such feelings. Of the moderns, Hume stands out as someone whose moral philosophy gives a prominent place to contempt in the evolution of a proper response to vice. See, e.g., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), bk. 2, pt. 2, *passim*, and *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), sec. 2, pt. 1. For a discussion that is sensitive to Hume's endorse-

Yet, such potential ugliness has not prevented moral philosophers from investigating attitudes that can be equally unappealing. Morally motivated anger and hatred, for example, receive their share of philosophical attention. Likewise, one need only point to philosophers' attention to resentment as a moral attitude, and to remind oneself of the forms that resentment can take, to realize that contempt's neglect is not warranted by whatever suspicions we might have that it is too unpalatable to merit our attention, let alone inspire a defense.⁹

I refer to contempt as an attitude. One might just as easily refer to it as an emotion or feeling. All three terms are fraught, I'm afraid, with their own philosophical baggage. "Attitude" best captures, I think, contempt's quality as a form of regard (a quality not characteristic of all emotions or feelings). In taking up contempt as a form of regard, I mean to justify—ultimately, morally justify—a certain affective stance toward another person, not (or not merely) the adoption of a certain belief about them (e.g., that they are contemptible).¹⁰ Finally, my ref-

ment of contempt, one that finds it necessary to defend such endorsement from the charge of cruelty, see Baier, p. 449. Still, we may have to look as far back as Aristotle—to his conviction that the *megalopsuchos* "is justified when he despises, since his beliefs are true" and to the role he assigns in moral education to "hating the right things" and "hating finely"—to find an expression of the kind of ethical importance I mean to assign properly focused contempt. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), esp. IV.3 1124b5 (p. 101), X.1 1172a23 (p. 266), and X.9 1179b26 (p. 292). On the contemporary scene, one is more likely to find scholars outside philosophy setting their sights on contempt. For example, see Don Herzog, *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), esp. chaps. 5–9; and William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), chap. 9, "Mutual Contempt and Democracy." Although Herzog and Miller acknowledge the power of contempt in political and social life, they do not address the problem I set for myself here. The closest I have come to finding contemporary philosophical allies in helping to hone my thoughts on the justification of contempt as a moral attitude are P. F. Strawson in his well-known essay, "Freedom and Resentment" and Jeffrie Murphy's contribution to an exchange with Jean Hampton on forgiveness and mercy. See P. F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962), reprinted in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 59–80; Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Jeffrie G. Murphy "Forgiveness and Resentment," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, ed. Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, and Howard K. Wettstein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), vol. 7, pp. 503–16.

9. For a discussion of moral hatred, see Murphy and Hampton. The classic work on resentment includes Bishop Butler, "Upon Resentment," sermon 8 in his "Sermons by the Right Reverend Father in God Joseph Butler, D. C. L.," published in *The Works of the Right Reverend Father in God Joseph Butler, D. C. L.* (London: J. F. Dove, 1828); and Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment."

10. If one allows that emotions and attitudes such as contempt have cognitive content as well as an affective quality, then one may ask whether in showing contempt to be justifiable one means to justify (merely) the belief that, say, another is a person of comparatively low moral worth (or whatever cognitive content one takes to be characteristic

erence to contempt as an attitude alludes to P. F. Strawson's discussion of what he calls, famously, the reactive attitudes—a discussion on which I draw to individuate contempt in general, as well as to specify the conditions necessary for its proper focus and moral propriety.

I offer Camille's contempt as a paradigm case and starting point for an initial sketch of the attitude. Although we have lost a transitive verb form to function as *contemn* itself once did, it seems most apt to say that Paul's failing prompts Camille to despise him.¹¹ If this is correct, then contempt inherits the connotation of looking down upon its object (*despise* deriving from the Latin *despicere*, to look down upon).¹² In Camille's words, Paul's failure reveals him to be “not a man.” If we understand “man” here—or more generally “person”—to be functioning in a purely descriptive sense, then Camille speaks, of course, falsely.¹³ But there is no reason to ascribe such a mistake to her. In looking down upon Paul as being “not a man,” I suggest, Camille's attitude presumes to track how well or ill Paul fares when measured against the standards of excellence properly applied to men or, more generally, persons understood in a normative sense. In this sense, persons are beings entitled to certain rights and expectations concerning our behavior toward them and who themselves are responsible for recognizing certain rights, demands, and expectations concerning their behavior toward others. At this general level, the contempt I seek to defend in the name of Camille is a response to a failing presumed to lessen another's worth as a person, in the sense of lowering their standing in the system of expectations,

of contempt) or to justify the cognitive-affective whole that constitutes the attitude. In what follows, I intend to justify the latter. I also should note that on the theory of the emotions that I favor, a person who experiences contempt for another need not thereby judge or believe—at least not in any sense transparent to them—that the target of their attitude is a person of comparatively low moral worth (or whatever cognitive content one takes to be characteristic of contempt). Although I prefer to avoid entering here into a debate between so-called judgmentalist versus nonjudgmentalist theories of the emotions, I favor a less “judgmentalist” view, where emotions nonetheless present their objects as possessing certain properties, which properties dictate what I call the conditions of proper focus of the emotion. For some indication of the terms of the relevant debate, see—for the judgmentalists—Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: A Theory of the Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Solomon and—for the nonjudgmentalists—Patricia Greenspan, *Emotions and Reasons: An Inquiry into Emotional Justification* (New York: Routledge, 1988); and Robert C. Roberts, “What an Emotion Is: A Sketch,” *Philosophical Review* 97 (1988): 183–209.

11. *Contempt* derives etymologically from the Old French *contemner*, meaning to slight, scorn, disdain, or despise (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*). The same dictionary definition has it that contempt is “the holding or treating as of little account, or as vile and worthless.” As will become apparent, I am skeptical that utter worthlessness, as opposed to comparatively low worth, is the feature that contempt necessarily presents its object as possessing.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Understood in this sense, “person” is synonymous with “human being.”

demands, and rights (merited and owed) that define normative relations with our fellows.¹⁴

In short, I suggest we best understand contempt as presenting its object as low in the sense of ranking low in worth as a person in virtue of falling short of some legitimate interpersonal ideal of the person, one the contemner endorses if not one that she herself succeeds in meeting.¹⁵ Having contempt for another, again, does not involve merely judging or believing that the relevant other ranks low as a person but, rather, involves regarding the other as one who thus ranks low. One comes to see the other as inferior, that is, when measured against the relevant interpersonal ideal. This form of regard has a salient affective quality: we feel pained in the presence of its object, which thereby becomes for us a source of aversion (as does Paul for Camille). Although I believe that the behavioral manifestations of contempt can be quite varied, they will share this quality of aversion (avoiding social situations where the other is present and refusing to shake a hand come to mind as examples). It is a separate question what one might further be motivated to do out of contempt. It is worth emphasizing, in this connec-

14. I return to elaborate on the relevant ways in which contempt focuses on persons thus understood below. It has been objected to me that the presentation of its object that I take to be constitutive of contempt—namely, that the object has rendered him- or herself low as a person (in the normative sense just described)—is not an appropriate construal of the attitude. The objection has it that, rather than one's concern being with the object's standing as a person in some morally loaded sense, one may simply view the object as something to be avoided. It is worth noting that the objection does not, in any case, block my argument for the moral propriety of contempt. Rather, it at most urges a revision in my theses. On the objector's understanding of the way in which contempt presents its object, my first thesis becomes the thesis that some forms of contempt—call them the *moralized* forms—have moral content in that they presume to pass judgment on their object's worth as a person. (Corresponding to the revision in the first thesis would be a revision in the proper focus conditions of contempt as such; e.g., the elimination of conditions 2 and 3.) My second thesis then becomes the thesis that some forms of contempt—among them the moralized forms—are sometimes morally justifiable. Although I cannot defend the view here, I believe that the case for understanding contempt as such to be an attitude with the proposed moral content is strengthened by considering that the reciprocal attitude to contempt (i.e., that which it is fitting for the contemptible to feel for themselves) is shame. No doubt, an objector may likewise argue that shame is not best understood as an attitude possessing moral content. That such views are mistaken is a conclusion I hope to argue for elsewhere. I thank Daniel Jacobson and Justin D'Arms for pressing me on this point.

15. We need not assume that a contemner such as Camille looks down upon her target in virtue of herself being superior in the relevant respect; to do so would make self-contempt a conceptual impossibility. Although my main concern is with contempt directed at others, we ought to be able to preserve an understanding of the attitude that recognizes the possibility of self-contempt.

tion, that contempt is not necessarily a retributive emotion.¹⁶ Whereas essentially retributive emotions (such as revenge) suggest a desire to hurt their object, contempt just as soon turns one away from its object in withdrawal.¹⁷

I do not intend this brief sketch as a complete account of the attitude. I do intend it, however, to present the most prominent necessary marks—or identification conditions—of the attitude we intuitively identify, as in the case of Camille, as contempt. Identification conditions are those conditions that determine the circumstances in which a certain emotion or attitude is intelligible. It is a further question whether an instance of an attitude thus identified as contempt is evidentially appropriate to its object. In turning to the evidentiary propriety conditions of contempt, we turn to conditions that must be met if contempt for another is to be what I call properly focused. Conditions for an attitude's or emotion's proper focus are those conditions that must be met if the attitude or emotion is to accurately present its object.¹⁸ That is, an attitude is properly focused if and only if its intentional object in fact possesses those features that the attitude presents the object as possessing.¹⁹ Once we have properly focused contempt in view, we finally can turn to the question of its moral propriety.

What, then, are the conditions of contempt's proper focus? In determining these, it is helpful to consider a class of attitudes with which

16. That is, although contempt might quite often be accompanied by retributive feelings, such feelings are not essential to contempt. There exists nonretributive, albeit repudiating, contempt where the evaluative scheme is set right not by hurting (and so desiring to hurt) the transgressor but, rather, by otherwise honoring or promoting the value transgressed in order to set the evaluative scheme aright. One class of relevant examples will be familiar to anyone who has ever engaged in civic protest. In such situations, one finds no small amount of contempt for abusive police officers; the fact that one channels one's contempt into acts of civil disobedience rather than slugging a cop does not show that one is any less contemptuous than the slugger.

17. Thus the etymological distinction between *contempt/contemn*, which (again) derive from the Old French *contemner*—to slight, scorn, disdain, or despise—and *condemn*, which derives from the Old French *condemner*—to convict, damage, or hurt (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*).

18. I here assume a view of the emotions on which they involve so-called evaluative presentations. One might propose, e.g., that a person merits one's resentment in the sense relevant to proper focus in virtue of having intentionally wronged one—this because resentment involves an evaluative presentation of its object as having wronged one. For further discussion of such evaluative presentations, see D'Arms and Jacobson, esp. pp. 66, 71, and 73–75.

19. This leaves open the question whether there are emotions and attitudes that have no conditions of proper focus because they do not admit of the kind of rationalization the notion of proper focus attempts to capture. Such may be true of love, for example. On this point as it relates to love, see Gabriele Taylor, "Love," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 76 (1976): 147–64.

contempt in my view has important affinities: those attitudes Strawson calls the reactive attitudes. As Strawson describes them, reactive attitudes are, at the most general level, reactions to qualities of will—good, ill, or indifferent—as manifested in attitudes and actions. That we are prone to such attitudes reflects the importance to us of the quality of will that human actions and attitudes express and our expectations and demands concerning them. Absent special circumstances, we expect or demand some degree of goodwill or regard from others and treat ourselves as answerable to the demand as made of us. Reactive attitudes are “reactive” in being reactions to the responses to this demand.

Strawson draws a number of distinctions in attempting to trace the contours of the concept of a reactive attitude. He first isolates the personal reactive attitudes, reactions to the quality of another person’s will—good, ill, or indifferent—toward us, as manifested in his attitudes and actions. The personal reactive attitudes, of which resentment and gratitude are paradigm cases, are what Strawson calls “non-detached” in that they are “reactions of people directly involved in transactions with each other.”²⁰ These attitudes contrast with both “detached” reactive attitudes that take a more general scope and with self-reactive attitudes. The former, of which indignation is a paradigm case, are reactions to the quality of another person’s will—good, ill, or indifferent—toward those of concern to us. Strawson treats members of this second class of reactive attitudes as vicarious analogues of the personal reactive attitudes; for example, indignation is the vicarious analogue of resentment. Finally, the self-reactive attitudes are reactions to our own quality of will as expressed toward others, reactions connected with the expectations and demands of others on us. Strawson places in this class the sense of obligation, guilt, and shame.

Strawson further distinguishes between reactive attitudes that are moral and those that are not. Oddly, his proposal for marking the moral-nonmoral distinction is in terms of whether the reactive attitude in question is experienced vicariously on behalf of another (the moral cases) or in response to an injury to oneself (the nonmoral cases). That is, the second class of reactive attitudes I distinguished just is the class of moral reactive attitudes on Strawson’s view. But, surely, our responses to the good or ill will that others express to us are not any less moral in virtue of being concerned with our own case.²¹ Alternatively, one might seek a means of capturing the moral-nonmoral distinction among

20. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” p. 62.

21. Strawson has since acknowledged that he was too restrictive in limiting the moral to the vicarious reactive attitudes. See “Reply to Ayer and Bennett,” in *Philosophical Subjects: Essays Presented to P. F. Strawson*, ed. Zak van Straaten (New York: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 260–66.

the reactive attitudes by distinguishing reactive attitudes that possess explicit moral content from those that do not. That is, on one view of what it is for an emotion or attitude to be a moral emotion or attitude, its content must explicitly invoke moral properties of its object or otherwise explicitly invoke moral concepts.²² Thus, resentment and indignation often are supposed to be prototypical moral attitudes in virtue of their content invoking the concept of a wrong, a fundamental moral concept. In contrast, gratitude and anger, two examples Strawson cites of reactive attitudes, do not appear to be moral in this sense. Nonetheless, gratitude and anger—no less than resentment and indignation—are reactive attitudes insofar as they are responses to the quality of will that others express toward us or those of concern to us. This fact, however, suggests a broader understanding of “moral” for which it is true that all the reactive attitudes are in fact moral attitudes: namely, the sense in which it is true that to regard one as within the scope of the particular reactive attitude is to regard one as answerable to an expectation or demand that forms part of a system of expectations, demands, and rights the regulation in accordance with which is necessary for aspiring to moral community with us.²³ In this sense, regarding one as within the scope of the reactive attitudes is constitutive of regarding one as a moral agent.

Although such attitudes might not possess explicit moral content, they are moral attitudes in having what we might call moral import. The fundamental moral import of attitudes that are moral in this broader sense is evident in the distinction most central to Strawson’s parsing of the reactive and nonreactive attitudes. This is the distinction between regarding another person as within the scope of the reactive attitudes and taking toward them what Strawson calls the “objective” attitude. We take the objective attitude toward a person when we view him or her as “an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment.”²⁴ In short, to take the ob-

22. Such, e.g., appears to be the understanding of “moral emotion” endorsed by D’Arms and Jacobson. R. Jay Wallace defends the view that the specifically moral reactive attitudes are those “linked to obligations for which the agent is herself able to provide moral justifications”; see his *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), esp. pp. 34 ff. Wallace’s account of the moral reactive attitudes is more restrictive than my own.

23. I do not defend Strawson’s case for the indispensability of the reactive attitudes here. My strategy is to assume that case and argue for the inclusion of contempt within the class of relevant attitudes. My defense of properly focused contempt thus is vulnerable to objections directed at the reactive attitudes as such. Although I do not take up such objections here, my defense of contempt suggests that those willing to embrace attitudes such as resentment should not then balk at claims of the propriety of certain instances of properly focused contempt.

24. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” p. 66.

jective attitude toward someone in the absence of standard excusing conditions is to fail to regard her as a free, responsible agent; as such, it is to fail to regard her as a moral agent at all.²⁵

Strawson's distinctions, whatever their difficulties, attempt to trace the contours of a concept whose extension includes forms of regard that are fitting their intentional objects just in case the object is a person with whom you or those of concern to you share some interpersonal relationship, which person is legitimately held to the expectation or demand for expressing toward you or those of concern to you some degree of goodwill or regard. In response to your expectations regarding the quality of will you legitimately expect such a person to exhibit, you appropriately regard that person with a relevant reactive attitude. Moreover, in the absence of excusing conditions, regarding someone as within the scope of the reactive attitudes is constitutive of regarding him as a moral agent. Properly focused contempt, I now want to argue, is such an attitude.²⁶ My case for its being so relies on a comparison with Strawson's discussion of the reactive attitude of resentment.

According to Strawson:

1. Resentment is an appropriate attitudinal response to being offended or injured by the action of another when the offense or injury is one for which the agent is appropriately held responsible, for example,
 - a) the agent was not on the occasion of acting ignorant of causing offense or injury, compelled, or forced,
 - b) the agent was not on the occasion of acting "not herself," and
 - c) the agent is not psychologically abnormal or morally undeveloped.
2. Resentment rests on an expectation or demand that others manifest a reasonable degree of goodwill or regard for people in general, and
3. if an agent is to avoid a form of moral solipsism, then she must regard herself as an appropriate object of reactive attitudes such as resentment, both her own and others'.

Strawson appears to intend 1 and 2 as conditions of what I've called proper focus. He aims to specify, that is, those features that must be present if resentment is to be evidentially appropriate to its object (no-

25. Presumably, however, taking the objective attitude toward someone is compatible with continuing to regard him as a being who makes some claim on us and our behavior.

26. It is not clear to me whether Strawson himself would include contempt among the reactive attitudes. His few mentions of contempt are cases not where contempt is cited as itself a reactive attitude but, rather, cases where another's contempt provokes a reactive attitude. See, e.g., Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," p. 63.

tably arguing that metaphysical freedom of will is not among them). Condition 3, in contrast, is not a condition of resentment's proper focus; it does not speak to the question of whether the object of the attitude merits resentment in the sense of possessing the features resentment presents its objects as having. It does suggest, however, a condition the resenter must satisfy for her resentment to be morally unobjectionable—provided we understand the inclination to direct resentment at others while excluding oneself as a form of moral hypocrisy. Here is one place, then, where we see the difference between questions concerning proper focus and those concerning moral propriety.

Although Strawson's discussion of resentment is richer than this schematic overview, it provides a useful model for thinking about contempt and its conditions of proper focus, conditions we can expect to depart from those of resentment in just those respects that contempt differs from resentment. How does contempt differ from resentment?

First, although resentment and contempt both may take persons as opposed to acts as their object, contempt more typically takes as its intentional object persons rather than acts, a characteristic I dub contempt's *person-focus*.²⁷ One typically *resents that* ____, *is indignant at* ____, or *expresses moral indignation at* ____, where what fills the blank is some propositional content referring to an act as performed by an agent or a state of affairs as brought about by an agent. For example, one may resent that Ann left one off the guest list or be indignant at the nepotism that the boss has let reign in her hiring decision. In contrast, one typically *holds* ____ *in contempt*, *regards* ____ *with contempt*, or *expresses contempt for* ____, where what fills the blanks are particular persons or groups of persons.²⁸ Thus, for example, Camille regards Paul with contempt and Lang expresses his contempt for Prokosch when he implies that his attitude toward culture is no better than that of a Nazi.

We do, of course, also say things like "I resent so-and-so for what she did," where "so-and-so" is a particular person or groups of persons. This locution, however, strikes me as retaining the act-focus typical of resentment as opposed to contempt. However, even if it is correct in such cases to regard a person as the intentional object of the resentment, the attitude is directed to the person qua the perpetrator of such-and-

27. Jean Hampton makes a related point in distinguishing resentment and indignation (which take as their objects acts) from hatred (which takes as its object persons). See Murphy and Hampton, p. 60. This suggests an affinity between what I am calling contempt and what Hampton calls moral hatred.

28. For a vivid example of contempt directed at collective agents, see former O. J. Simpson prosecutor Christopher A. Darden's discussion of his contempt for the criminal justice system that in his view allowed Simpson's murder trial to turn into a trial of race relations in America. Christopher A. Darden, *In Contempt* (New York: ReganBooks, 1996), p. 383.

such a deed (or omission) rather than, as I suggest is true of contempt, the person or group of persons regarded as being in themselves contemptible, in virtue of some quality that defines a more enduring aspect of their identity—that is, something that approaches the level of generality of a character trait.²⁹ If you find yourself cursing your roommate's sloppiness, it may be that you resent her leaving the apartment in such a state or, perhaps, you are indignant at the lack of consideration that her sloppiness displays. If you find yourself cursing "that slob," however, you likely have traversed into the domain of contempt. Likewise, if you are contemptuous of your colleague, a tenured professor, because she never publishes, exploits her students, and quite generally abuses her position, it is unlikely that you view her as an upstanding person who happens routinely to act in a professionally irresponsible manner; rather, you are likely to interpret her behavior with regard to her professional responsibilities as indicative of some faulty quality of character. Contempt, to adopt a phrase of Augustine's, thus will have none of "Despise the sin but not the sinner." The "sin" in such a case is simply an outer manifestation of something taken to go to the core of the "sinner," something taken to be contemptible.³⁰

29. A second locution—the simple "I resent so-and-so"—does appear to be focused on the person him- or herself without qualification, however. In such cases, we might suppose that what is resented is the person's very existence. However, even if such limiting cases of resentment resemble contempt in taking persons as objects, differences nonetheless remain even at this initial level of analysis. First, although we may in light of such examples concede that even resentment can be person- (as opposed to act-) *directed*, its *focus* remains the act. Second, the emotional quality of the attitude in the case of resentment strikes me as being less severe than is that of contempt. Although contemporary English has lost a common transitive verb form for expressing contempt (to function as "contemn" itself once functioned), I take it that something on the order of "I despise you" is more accurate as a popular expression of contempt than is the comparatively tepid "I resent you."

30. This focus of contempt on a person as its object is well illustrated in Moravia's novel, chap. 21, esp. pp. 187–88, though Moravia's narrator there exploits this aspect of contempt in order to suggest that his wife's contempt has taken its focus without any benefit of evidence. It has been objected to my claim of such person-focus that there is no conceptual or psychological bar to admitting "localized" forms of contempt. Sometimes the objection seems to me to confuse the grounds for contempt with its object. For example, if I say I despise so-and-so's philosophical style, that does not settle the issue of my contempt's object. It might signal that I have contempt for so-and-so (here the attitude takes so-and-so as its intentional object) on the ground that she engages in shoddy argumentation. But might it not be the case, the objection continues, that my contempt extends no farther than to so-and-so's style? And isn't such contempt compatible with my admiring so-and-so for certain other of her qualities? Such a psychological possibility is at odds with what I describe as contempt's permeating quality, and the latter strikes me as more phenomenologically accurate than the psychological segregation that the objection would allow. As for the conceptual question: again, I could grant that localized contempt is possible without that impugning my case for the more morally interesting (because presumed to be more morally problematic) globalized species of contempt for persons.

A second distinction concerns the grounds on which contempt, as opposed to resentment, is intelligibly held. Whereas resentment as such is a response to knowing offense, injury, or wronging, contempt as such is much broader in its scope, being a reaction to any range of transgressions against an ideal of the person that the contemner holds dear. For example, one reads these days that in the hills of western North Carolina there is no small amount of contempt for Jews, blacks, abortionists, homosexuals, the FBI, and the New World Order.³¹ Although some of this contempt might be motivated by thoughts that these groups have somehow knowingly offended, injured, or wronged one or one's comrades, such thoughts are not necessary for an attitude to count as contempt. What does appear necessary, in contrast, is that the object of contempt ranks quite low in comparison with the relevant ideal of the person. The contempt of the members of the so-called Christian Identity movement who inhabit the North Carolina hills is motivated, for example, by the beliefs that "Jews are the product of Eve's mating with Satan, and . . . blacks are 'mud people.'"³² The problem with the FBI agents is that they are stupid "city-slickers."³³

Contempt as such thus does not suppose that its object has committed some personal offense, injury, or wrong against the contemner. Although the contempt of the Christian Identity members is not properly focused (a point to which I return), it does exhibit the same presentation of its object as we find in the case of Camille's contempt for Paul: it presents its object as less of a person in virtue of failing to attain, at even a minimal level, the relevant personal ideal. Such ideals, as we know, are subject to deformation and excess. In holding others (or ourselves) up to unrealistic ideals, we risk finding fault where none ought to be ascribed. On one possible reading of *Le mépris*, for example, Camille's expectation that Paul imprudently upset the status quo between himself and his producer, thereby jeopardizing a much-needed job, in order to defend her honor is a juvenile expectation and perhaps one for which she is more justly faulted for measuring Paul against than is Paul for failing to meet the measure.³⁴ By measuring others and our-

31. The bigots in question belong to a movement known as the "Christian Identity" movement. They are discussed in an article reporting on the failed manhunt for Eric Rudolph, the alleged bomber/murderer thought to be hiding out in the Nantahala Mountains. See Tony Horwitz, "Letter from Nantahala: Run, Rudolph, Run (How the Fugitive Became a Folk Hero)," *New Yorker* (March 15, 1999), pp. 46–52.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 48. The contempt for the FBI, at least, is sometimes expressed with attempted humor: e.g., "a restaurant down the road in Andrews, NC, offers 'F. B. I. Curly Fries,' meant to signify that the agency is going in circles" (*ibid.*, p. 49).

34. In Moravia's novel, Molteni (Michel Piccoli's "Paul" in the film) suggests just such an assessment of Emilia (Brigitte Bardot's "Camille"); see chap. 21. One should note, however, that Molteni is an unreliable narrator.

selves against unrealistic ideals, we thus court unjustified intolerance and self-righteousness, both of them again attitudes that can foster cruelty.

Third, and related to contempt's person-focus, is the fact that contempt permeates one's interactions with the person who is its object in a way that resentment typically does not. Such is suggested, for example, by the slob case. Consider, by way of contrast, the following. My resenting the fact that Ann lobbied behind my back for the post that I aspired to fill need not color my assessment of Ann in the entire domain of my interactions with her—perhaps the same ambition that gained her the post explains why I also am willing to serve on her committee. In the case of my regarding with contempt “that slob,” my roommate, the description under which I regard her with contempt becomes her most salient description for purposes of my interaction with and assessment of her. This phenomenon is illustrated well in Godard's *Le mépris*, where we can imagine Camille's contempt for Paul to turn on the salient description of Paul as a sell-out, a cad, or a coward of a man and husband. Some such description colors the way in which Camille views her husband in all her interactions with him. This person-focused, pervasive quality of contempt is, admittedly, another aspect that makes it susceptible to abuse.³⁵

Godard's film highlights a fourth distinguishing feature of contempt: the way in which contempt can so contaminate one person's view of another that there is a point beyond which forgiveness and reconciliation might no longer be forthcoming. If, as some philosophers have urged, forgiveness requires the kind of segregation of agent from act that Augustine recommended, then the person who displays contempt risks losing the capacity to forgive.³⁶ I have suggested that resentment is limited or circumscribed in a way that contempt typically is not. The pervasive character of contempt thus further distinguishes it from resentment by making certain forms of concern and, with them, the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation, more difficult to maintain.

Finally, to return to the comparative character of contempt: although the possibility of self-contempt suggests that one who directs

35. Moravia provides an excellent illustration of the sense in which contempt attaches to assessments of character and the special corruptions to which contempt thereby becomes susceptible. In the novel, the narrator Molteni (Paul) eventually comes to the following understanding of his wife Emilia's (Camille's) contempt for him: “In other words, in Emilia's attitude towards me there was an appraisal of my worth, an estimate of my character, quite independent of my actions. The latter, it so happened, had appeared to confirm her appraisal and her estimate; but, even without such a confirmation, she would not, in all probability, have judged me differently” (p. 187).

36. See, e.g., Murphy, p. 508.

contempt at another does not thereby necessarily view himself as superior, human nature is such that we are vulnerable to so regarding ourselves even when the evidence is against us. Our vulnerability to error and self-deception regarding our own merits in comparison with others thus points to another aspect of contempt in virtue of which it is vulnerable to abuse.

This account of contempt in general makes vivid the worries that prompt special concern about embracing contempt as a moral attitude, in the sense of being a morally justifiable attitude. Nonetheless, if we concern ourselves with contempt in its properly focused form, the form in which it responds to evidence that someone has rendered themselves low as measured by a legitimately imposed ideal of the person, we can respond to such worries. Before turning to contempt's moral justifiability, then, I suggest that we mine Strawson's treatment of resentment for a sketch of the conditions necessary for its proper focus:

1. It is directed at a person as a response to his violation of an interpersonal ideal of the person,³⁷
2. which violation stems from a morally evaluable character trait,
3. the expression of which character trait is one for which the agent is appropriately held responsible, for example,
 - a) the agent was not on the occasion of acting innocently ignorant of causing offense or injury, compelled, or forced,³⁸
 - b) the agent was not on the occasion of acting "not herself,"
 - c) the agent is not psychologically abnormal or morally undeveloped, and
4. there exists a legitimate expectation or demand that the agent approximate the interpersonal ideal.³⁹

Recall what these conditions of contempt's proper focus are conditions of. They are conditions of the accuracy of contempt's evaluative presentation of its object. I have suggested that evaluative presentation is of its object as ranking low in worth as a person in virtue of flouting

37. Recall that contempt also may be properly focused on collective agents, with condition 1 revised accordingly.

38. In contrast to Strawson, I require here that the ignorance in question be innocent in the sense of itself not being blameworthy. If not thus modified, Camille's contempt for Paul would be unjustified for failure to meet requirement 3a—in the film Paul is ignorant of causing offense at the time of acting. Indeed, throughout the film, Paul is perplexed by his inability to comprehend what, if anything, he has done wrong—thereby fueling Camille's contempt even more.

39. To be sure, each of the conditions of properly focused contempt deserves more detailed treatment than I can provide here. The present sketch should suffice, however, to highlight the kind of argument involved in defending, or rejecting, contempt as a moral attitude.

some relevant interpersonal ideal of the person. The conditions of proper focus outline the circumstances under which one truly has rendered oneself low in this respect.⁴⁰

Despite the differences between contempt and resentment, they give us no reason to suppose that contempt in its properly focused form is any less a reactive attitude than is resentment in being a reaction to another's expressing toward us or those of concern to us some quality of will (good, bad, or indifferent). In the case of resentment, the relevant quality of will typically is expressed in another's actions; contempt simply takes a broader range of expressive features of the person to be indicative of their quality of will. To coin a slogan: whereas resentment reacts to what we ought not stoop to do, contempt reacts to what we ought not stoop to be.

Neither is contempt, for all the differences between it and resentment, any less a moral attitude. I have noted that moral philosophers typically acknowledge resentment as a moral attitude or emotion in virtue of its conceptual tie to someone's having been wronged. My denial that contempt shares this conceptual tie, however, does not impugn contempt's status as a moral attitude. First, properly focused contempt shares in the broad sense in which I argued all the reactive attitudes are moral attitudes. Second, like resentment (and in contrast to the reactive attitudes of gratitude and anger), contempt also is a moral attitude in the more narrow sense of possessing explicit moral content. It is so in virtue of the fact that it presents its object (a person) as ranking low in worth as a person (understood in a normative sense) because he or she falls short when measured against some relevant ideal of the person. Although the ideal in question may not itself explicitly invoke moral concepts or properties (recall the Christian Identity mem-

40. It is worth repeating that identification conditions govern the intelligibility of an emotion in a context, conditions of proper focus govern what I call its evidentiary propriety, and moral conditions govern its moral propriety. There is nothing exhaustive, of course, about this classification. We might also consider, e.g., conditions of an emotion's prudential propriety, and so on. It has been objected to me that among what I submit are conditions for contempt's intelligibility or proper focus are, in fact, conditions of moral propriety. Isn't it intelligible to have contempt for a dog, for example? For a species of dog—toy poodles, perhaps (the example of an anonymous editor)? Or is such contempt intelligible only as directed at persons, e.g., those responsible for breeding such sorry canine specimens? My account of contempt as such supports either adopting the latter view or interpreting canine contempt as anthropomorphic. These disputes over whether a condition is one of intelligibility or evidentiary propriety, and so on, are difficult to adjudicate. Although I do not presume here to have settled the dispute definitively, doing so is not necessary for my purpose. Those readers who object that what I present as identification and/or proper focus conditions for contempt are infected by moral legislation may read me as concerned to ask of a moralized species of contempt whether instances of that particular species are morally justifiable—and answering in the affirmative.

bers), the attitude's concern with the worth of persons in the normative sense I proposed ought to qualify on any sufficiently rich understanding of "moral" as a moral concern.⁴¹

In short, although my profile of contempt in general notes some of its possible abuses, the worries I have noted are, first, irrelevant to the question whether contempt is ever fitting its object and, second, insufficient to provide an argument against the claim that such properly focused contempt is sometimes morally justified. I now want to turn to this latter claim.

IV. CONDITIONS OF PROPERLY FOCUSED CONTEMPT'S MORAL JUSTIFICATION

A complete defense of the moral propriety of properly focused contempt would need to take on each of the purportedly overriding moral reasons against it. Although I cannot undertake such a defense here, my experience suggests that philosophers regard a certain core group of objections as particularly damning. In anticipation of what I find correct in their objections, I wish to mine two of their worries for an account of two conditions, in addition to those for contempt's proper focus, that contempt must meet if it is to be morally justifiable. First, there is the objection that contempt is morally unjustifiable because our own moral failures make it wrong for us to look down upon others. Second is the objection that contempt, however properly focused, is incompatible with moral injunctions toward forgiveness because it renders the latter impossible. Although the objectors are mistaken to think that these considerations block all arguments in defense of properly focused contempt's moral propriety, each voices a valid moral worry.

First, although the conditions of contempt's proper focus are independent of considerations concerning the faults of the contemner, that does not imply that the conditions of the moral permissibility of regarding another with contempt are likewise independent. Just as it would be a form of moral hypocrisy for the resenter to regard herself as outside the potential scope of the attitude, for example, it would be morally objectionable for the contemner to have contempt for another but not stand prepared to likewise censor a similar fault in himself. The first objection thus suggests that for properly focused contempt to be morally justified, it must be true that:

41. Thus, on my view, contempt as such is (descriptively) a moral attitude in virtue of its presentation of its object; only properly focused contempt, however, counts as a reactive attitude in taking as its grounds features of persons in fact reflective of their quality of will.

5. The attitude is directed by an agent who does not possess a similar fault or, if he does, is committed to regarding himself in the relevant circumstances as likewise contemptible in virtue of it.

Second, I acknowledge that an attitude that in effect blinded those who had it to evidence that its object had repented or otherwise changed for the better—thus blinding them to evidence that legitimately counts in favor of forgiveness—would be an attitude that it was morally objectionable to endorse. Contempt's moral justification thus would in addition appear to require the condition that:

6. The attitude is responsive to evidence that would count in favor of forgiveness or some other relevant change in attitude.⁴²

These six conditions in place, I now want to argue that the contempt they individuate is sometimes a morally justifiable response to persons who manifest bad characters. The argument proceeds by meeting remaining objections to the contrary. In the absence of unanswerable forthcoming objections, I suggest, moral philosophers ought to recognize contempt as a moral attitude in both of the senses I defend.

V. OBJECTIONS TO PROPERLY FOCUSED CONTEMPT

In discussion, I have encountered much resistance to my attempt to defend contempt as a moral attitude. Sometimes the resistance takes the form of objections to the attitude on grounds that concern its conditions of proper focus. Conditions 1, 2, and 3 thus are said to inherit problems that resentment, for example, in comparison avoids. Other times, the objections to contempt are specifically moral ones, deriving not from its conditions of proper focus but from the belief that there are always overriding moral reasons that render even properly focused contempt morally impermissible. Because I have met most resistance to them, I begin here with conditions 1, 5, and 6. I treat conditions 2 and 3 together in the next section, devoting to them a more lengthy discussion because the issues they raise are central to some prominent Kantian worries about contempt as a moral attitude.

In making central to contempt thoughts about the violation of an

42. I do not limit the condition to changes in attitude that constitute forgiveness because, depending on the ideal or value violated, talk of forgiveness may not be in place—as it seems always to be in place in those cases limited to wronging a person. For a discussion of the considerations that justify forgiveness, see Murphy, p. 508. Briefly, those considerations include (1) the agent repented or had a change of heart, or (2) she meant well (her motives were good), or (3) she has suffered enough, or (4) she has undergone humiliation, or (5) for old time's sake. I don't mean to endorse all of Murphy's grounds for forgiveness (I am particularly skeptical with regard to 5), but his is an example of the kind of work that would be involved in cashing out my condition 6 in those cases where talk of forgiveness is in place.

ideal or value rather than more specific thoughts about the wronging of a person, condition 1 marks contempt as broader in scope than moral philosophers typically take resentment to be. Now, Camille's contempt for her husband can be interpreted as a reaction to his wronging her, so clearly contempt can be a reaction to being wronged by another. However, no person's being wronged is required for contempt to be in place. This point is most easily seen in cases of people who respond inadequately to the value of things such as the environment or other living creatures. Consider, for example, a Manhattanite who justifies her contempt for Donald Trump by appealing to his inability to see a parcel of land as anything other than a development site to be exploited for his profit. No doubt, a Manhattanite with a certain sense of entitlement might regard this as a personal affront but her contempt is more properly motivated by the deleterious effect on the local ecosystem. So, too, people willing to degrade themselves in various ways arguably render themselves contemptible thereby, a conclusion that does not seem to presuppose that one can wrong oneself.⁴³ To the extent that we are justified in being morally concerned with values beyond those implicated in not wronging persons, such as the value of honoring the environment, other living creatures, or (arguably) ourselves, the breadth of contempt's scope in comparison with resentment impugns neither its proper focus nor its moral justifiability. To be sure, often it will be difficult to decide whether or not the demand to live up to the relevant ideal or value is legitimately imposed. That we perhaps are more likely to reach agreement in the case of those central values that are regarded as basic rights of persons with respect to which they can be wronged does not establish that an attitude that responds to the violation of other values is incapable of being properly focused or morally justified.⁴⁴

Turning to condition 5, there is the objection that since every one of us is in some respect a moral failure, none of us is in fact ever justified in regarding another person with contempt if that implies our own superiority. Although the objection serves as a useful reminder that we ought to examine our own conscience before presuming to engage in any negative moral assessment of others, it is not conclusive against the propriety of contempt. True, no one is perfect. Neither, however, do we

43. See, e.g., the characters dubbed "The Toads" in Graham Greene's *Dr. Fischer of Geneva, or The Bomb Party* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980).

44. That is, if my claim that a wrong need not have been committed for contempt to be properly focused remains controversial, that in large part may be due to the difficulty we have in circumscribing just what is appropriately regarded as a moral failing once we have abandoned the view that the concept of a wrong envelopes the whole of the moral domain. This breadth in contempt's scope also might go some way toward explaining why the evaluative scales can be set right in such cases by otherwise honoring the value transgressed rather than by seeking retribution.

all exhibit the same moral faults to the same degree. If, as I argue in the next section is the case, contempt takes persons as its focus in virtue of attaching to their enduring traits of character, we can ask whether the contemner is comparatively innocent. Consider here Fritz Lang's rebuff of Goebbels's job offer. We need not believe Lang to be a moral saint in order to regard his contempt for Goebbels as both properly focused and morally justified.

Turning to condition 6, I have encountered in discussion much resistance to the thought that an attitude deserving the name contempt can remain responsive to evidence that would favor forgiveness. The objection is sometimes expressed in the claim that contempt so colors one's view of its object and his or her behavior that one would be unable to see evidence that warranted the withdrawal of contempt for the evidence that it is. Thus, suppose Paul realizes that he callously encouraged Prokosch's sexual advances toward Camille and that he is profoundly sorry. He apologizes to her, attempts to regain her trust, and so on. The objection maintains that, given her contempt for Paul, Camille would be unable to see such behavior as genuine. Perhaps her contempt would incline her to interpret his apparent remorse as his latest ploy to regain her sexual favors, for example. According to this objection, contempt is an attitude that necessarily induces a form of interpretive blindness about its object.

There is another way of understanding the claim of incompatibility between contempt and forgiveness.⁴⁵ On this second understanding, although Camille is able to view accurately the evidence supposed to count in favor of forgiving Paul, her contempt exerts a trumping influence on such evidence. That is, even if Camille need make no mistake about the sincerity of Paul's apology and his claims to reform, we can imagine her insisting that this does not matter. Her refusal is based on an accurate assessment of the facts, but the facts somehow do not carry enough weight to override her contempt. On this interpretation of contempt's influence, the objection regarding incompatibility with forgiveness must have it that no evidence would prove sufficient to override contempt in the person who feels it. However, it is worth noting that the defender of properly focused contempt need not feel pressed to deny that such is ever the case with contempt. Indeed, there may be some cases where we want to say that evidence that would otherwise count in favor of forgiveness is appropriately trumped by the severity of the moral transgression that has aroused contempt. Consider, for example, the case of Franz Stangl, the Nazi commandant of Treblinka. After the war, Stangl was sentenced to life in prison. He maintained

45. I am indebted here to Josef Stern for suggesting that there are (at least) two different ways of interpreting the worry about contempt's incompatibility with forgiveness.

until just days before his death that he himself had done nothing wrong. As Gitta Sereny, the journalist who interviewed him at length in prison, describes his conception of responsibility until nearly the end of his life, Stangl regarded as irrelevant the fact that the men under his command had murdered people. Sereny writes: "It is, I think, because of this universal acceptance of a false concept of responsibility that Stangl himself (until just before he died), his family, and—in a wider but equally, if not even more, important sense—countless other people in Germany and outside it, have felt for years that what is decisive in law, and therefore in the whole conduct of human affairs, is what a man *does* on isolated occasions rather than what he *is*." Only in the end did Stangl finally acknowledge his role in the genocide: "But I was there. . . . So yes, in reality I share the guilt." From Sereny's description, it is plausible to believe that Stangl finally did experience genuine remorse and a change of heart. (I invite skeptics to imagine a comparably grave, genuinely remorseful, case.) Ought such a person's victims, or rather the survivors, forgive him? Should they feel morally pressured to stifle their contempt? I suggest there is no such moral claim on them.⁴⁶

Recall that requirement 6 is a normative claim about what is necessary if a certain attitude toward another is to be morally appropriate. It's not always clear, however, how the person who would deny the possibility of a form of contempt meeting condition 6—on either of the two interpretations just canvassed—intends the denial. Is it the empirical claim that anyone holding the attitude we correctly identify as contempt is, as a matter of fact, doomed to maintain that attitude even in the face of evidence that it ought to be abandoned? Or does the objection mean to make the conceptual claim that incompatibility with forgiveness is part of what it is for an attitude to count as contempt, such that apparent compatibility with forgiveness would warrant withdrawing the ascription of the attitude to Camille, for example? I believe both claims are wrong. In response to the empirical claim, I have only my own experience as counterexample and ask others to consult experiences of their own. As for the conceptual claim, I do not see the basis for it; common usage, for example, does not suggest that it is part of the very meaning of contempt that once one is a contemner, one is forever a contemner. Absent further argument, then, the objecting philosopher has no basis for presuming to correct an agent who sincerely identifies her attitude toward another as having been one of contempt when she reports that it was overcome by an earned forgiveness.

46. See Gitta Sereny, *Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience* (New York: Random, 1974), p. 124. I am indebted here to Paul Roth for prompting me to consider such cases.

VI. CONTEMPT AND RESPECT: SPECIAL (KANTIAN) WORRIES

Although the objection that contempt is incompatible with forgiveness or other relevant changes in attitude does not, I think, survive scrutiny, the trumping interpretation of the objection does point in the direction of a truth. The truth is that even properly focused contempt sets the bar very high when it comes to the evidence required to invalidate, and so unsettle, the attitude.⁴⁷ The reason why the bar is so high touches on conditions 2 and 3 and discussion of properly focused contempt as an assessment of character. It might be that contempt appears to be incompatible with forgiveness or some other relevant change in attitude because the fact that one holds another in contempt exerts a trumping influence over any evidence that falls short of evidence that the object has undergone some relevant change of character.

I have suggested that contempt is concerned with persons in two respects. First, contempt presumes to assess how its object ranks as a person understood in a normative sense. Second, contempt typically takes the person as a whole rather than isolated acts as its object. More remains to be said, however, about the way contempt takes a person as its object—particularly in what way it must take a person as its object if it is to be properly focused.

First, consider again cases of contempt that are not properly focused, such as a bigot's contempt for Jews, women, or blacks. What is amiss here, once we recall that contempt presents its object as brought low as a person, is that failing to meet a certain ideal of ethnicity, sex, or color of skin does not diminish one in worth as a person in the sense of "person" relevant to one's standing in the system of expectations, demands, and rights that define our normative relations with others. Those qualities in virtue of which one ranks low as a person in this sense would, at a minimum, be qualities both relevant to one's worth as a person in this sense and for which the person is legitimately held responsible.

If contempt is to be properly focused on persons, then, we need to make sense of holding people responsible not only for their acts but for themselves, that is, for who they are.⁴⁸ An appeal to character traits, I suggest, appears to fit the bill both in picking out enduring qualities of persons thought to speak to their worth as persons and which are plausibly regarded as within their domain of responsibility. Not only is there moral philosophical precedent for holding people responsible for their characters, ordinary folk typically stand prepared to do the same.

47. An adequate theory of the emotions would explain how they are responsive to evidence of the falsehood of the thoughts they presuppose, as well as how their cognitive content being thus undermined, their affective aspect tends to follow suit, or not.

48. Sereny's insight about responsibility makes salient this sense.

The degree to which they do so tends to vary with the social scientific trends of the age but so long as we manage to fend off skepticism and determinism about character, contempt has an available target.⁴⁹

Whether or not this challenge can be met in the case of character traits, there are those who would in any case object to contempt on the ground that it mistakenly equates persons with certain of their character traits or wrongly assumes that characters are monolithic. That is, if contempt tends to focus on the person as a whole, the objection arises that no one is, as a whole, contemptible. Everyone, the objection has it, has some redeeming quality. Such is the kind of objection that motivates Jean Hampton's worries about moral hatred, an attitude in many respects akin to contempt. Hampton puts her worry thus: "The inner moral state of a person is notoriously difficult to determine, not only that of others, but also (as Kant reminds us) our own. Evidence garnered from the moral quality of actions isn't decisive proof either way. . . . This would mean that moral hatred of people—as Augustine's saying 'Hate the sin, not the sinner' suggests—is always wrong because people never become so rotted as individuals that they lose all decency and goodness."⁵⁰ Now Hampton here conflates two separate issues: one regards the epistemic warrant of attitudes that presume to discern one's motivations and the other has to do with the epistemic warrant of attitudes that are what we might call global in scope. This first issue, although it is a proper Kantian worry, particularly in light of Kant's views about the inscrutability of maxims, is not a worry peculiar to contempt. Rather, the fact that motives are notoriously difficult to judge cautions care with regard to any reactive attitude that implies a judgment as to motivation. The question of epistemic warrant, then, cannot be what the Kantian finds especially problematic about contempt.

The second issue, that which concerns attitudes that are global in scope, demands more attention. The question the second issue raises is whether properly focused contempt presents its object as having a character that is, as a whole, "rotted" (as Hampton puts it) and, if so, whether such a presentation is ever accurate. Even the most despicable character, Hampton urges, is not devoid of all redeeming qualities. The objection now under consideration presents the defender of properly focused contempt with the choice of either insisting, what I doubt is true, that characters are in fact monolithic or of taking a closer look at

49. Questions about the extent to which our characters are shaped or determined by factors outside our control are clearly important and deserve more attention than I can give them here. Likewise, I do not attempt to respond here to recent arguments that the attribution of character traits is mistaken. See, e.g., Gilbert Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1999): 315–31; and John Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics," *Noûs* 32 (1998): 504–30.

50. Murphy and Hampton, pp. 152–53.

the nature of the thought that the person who is contempt's object fails to attain some minimal standard of worth as a person in virtue of manifesting a bad character.

Let us begin by supposing that, for example, although Paul's actions with regard to Camille are properly viewed as manifesting some fault of character (a fault manifest in his willingness to exploit his wife for his professional gain, as well as in his inability to grasp the compromising situation in which he has placed her for what it is), he also is known to be, say, a quite generous person.⁵¹ He volunteers two days a week at a local soup kitchen and regularly helps out struggling playwrights who approach him for advice, introductions, and the occasional loan. We stipulate, that is, that Paul has both some bad character trait that manifests itself in his behavior toward Camille but also the good character trait of generosity that manifests itself in the appropriate contexts with his pals. The question is whether this undermines the justification of Camille's contempt. I do not think that it does. Although I stipulate that this good aspect of Paul's character is no less a part of him than is his bad character trait, I believe that Camille's contempt is justifiable so long as she is warranted in granting greater weight to Paul's bad character trait. One way in which she might be so warranted is in virtue of standing in a special relationship to Paul. For example, judging Paul's character from the perspective of the special relationship in which she stands to him—namely that of wife to husband—Camille regards Paul's generosity at the soup kitchen as irrelevant to her assessment. That Camille is justified in doing so explains why Paul has no basis to object, "Well, yes, Dear, I was hoping to parlay your beauty and sex appeal for an opportunity to make my way to Hollywood; but how can you say I'm a wretched louse? What about all those weekends at the soup kitchen?"⁵² Such a response would in fact count as evidence in favor of a worse assessment of Paul precisely because he fails to appreciate its irrelevance. In short, and more precisely, the fact that gratitude might be a properly

51. The main issue here touches on the question of the unity of the virtues. Although I don't take up the latter question, I am inclined to think that Paul's behavior with regard to his wife could not cohabit with virtues such as loyalty or kindness. Although this begs questions about the unity of the virtues, it strikes me as less of a stretch to suppose that Paul's behavior with regard to Camille might be compatible with his being a quite generous person—hence my choice of example. The genre that I am, perhaps feebly, trying to emulate here might be called the "Robin Hood" genre. Its cast of characters includes the benevolent thief, the murderer who is an otherwise upright member of the community, the lecherous film producer who donates anonymous millions to charity, and so on.

52. This reminds me of a recent Academy Awards presentation where one of the recipients concluded his acceptance speech by thanking X, whom he referred to as his "trophy wife." I think that X might well have been outraged by such a comment (made, no less, to a viewing audience of millions) and it would merely add to the insult were the husband to respond to her, "But, Honey, see, I'm always thinking of you."

focused attitude toward Paul in certain relational contexts does not tell against the proper focus of contempt for him in other relational contexts, in this case, in the context of Camille's and his marriage. Neither would the proper focus of gratitude in certain relational contexts tell against the moral propriety of contempt in others.⁵³

On my view, then, the defender of properly focused contempt can maintain that it represents as "rotted" or comparatively vile a person who may in fact have redeeming qualities without thereby committing a mistake. The sense in which Camille's contempt so represents Paul as rotten or vile is in regarding him as meriting a certain attitude from her in the context of her relationship with him. That Paul's buddies down at the soup kitchen enjoy the fruits of his oddly myopic benevolence, far from mellowing her assessment that he is a louse, might serve only to make his treatment of her appear all the more callous. This suggests that in certain interpersonal contexts certain of a person's traits of character are appropriately viewed as more salient and treated as more important in assessing the degree to which the person embodies the moral ideal that the relationship presupposes.

There remains an apparent basis for moral objection arising from contempt's focus; this one is a moral objection deriving from the Kantian doctrine of respect for persons.⁵⁴ That doctrine prohibits us from treat-

53. It was a point of Daniel Brudney's that first got me thinking about the importance of such relational contexts to the question of whether contempt is appropriate in any given case. This point deserves more treatment than I give it here. For example, it may be that although it is appropriate for Camille to regard Paul with contempt it would not be appropriate for some third party to do so. Or, to take another example, it has been suggested to me that although it may be appropriate for Hilary Clinton to regard Bill with contempt, it is inappropriate for the average citizen to do so. I am less convinced of this latter claim; though it, too, may depend on the nature of the relationship one supposes to exist between a president and those he represents. Such cases are likely to differ from cases such as that of Stangl, whose crimes we regard as crimes against humanity itself.

54. The Kantian worry about respect, as I present it here, is a secularized moral version of a worry that Hampton presents in metaphysical and theological terms. The key feature of Hampton's metaphysics of the person is that it regards the person as something above and beyond not only the actions an agent performs but, also, above and beyond the character traits that issue in action. Thus, Hampton writes of someone who forgives a wrongdoer: "The forgiver never gives up her opposition to the wrongdoer's action, nor does she even give up her opposition to the wrongdoer's bad character traits. Instead, she revises her judgment of the person himself—where that person is understood to be something other than or more than the character traits of which she does not approve" (Murphy and Hampton, p. 85). And again, in distinguishing between two different ways of opposing evil in human beings, Hampton writes: "One who opposes and wants to correct her wrongdoer will experience and convey disapproval of the wrongdoer's action, and disapproval of any of the character traits from which his action flowed, but still insist that there is a core of decency within him. She will believe, not that he is rotten, but that he has only 'cloaked' himself in evil, where his character or dispositions or habits may be taken to be part of the cloak. . . . The repudiator, on the other hand, sees the wrongdoer,

ing others merely as instruments for the pursuit of our own ends. All rational creatures, on the Kantian view, are end-setting creatures, and it is a condition of the value that we assign to our own ends that we recognize that another's ends likewise have value. This sets in place a system of moral responsibilities and constraints with regard to our relations with our fellows. The question before us is whether even properly focused contempt—in its experience or expression—inevitably violates such moral responsibilities or constraints.

Now, one of Kant's own worries about contempt apparently is that it is complicitous in the shameful treatment of others. For example, in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, he associates contempt with the use of punishments such as drawing and quartering a man.⁵⁵ No doubt, drawing and quartering a man might be (an extreme!) expression of contempt, but why suppose that the fact that contempt might motivate such deeds serves as an argument against contempt itself?⁵⁶

The recognition that contempt is not essentially a retributive attitude goes some way, I think, toward answering this worry about its possible consequences. However, despite Kant's own reference to consequences here, it would be premature (and somewhat un-Kantian) to suppose that his primary worry about what is shameful about contempt is a worry about its consequences. The Kantian objection to contempt appears to be independent of the consequences to which contempt might lead. On one plausible reading, the Kantian's problem with contempt is that it embodies a kind of category mistake. Kant suggests that contempt involves regarding something of true worth to be worthless.⁵⁷

not merely as cloaked in evil, but as himself a bad thing, and so wants nothing to do with him for as long as he remains 'rotted' as an individual" (ibid., p. 152). This latter response of repudiation counts for Hampton as a case of moral hatred. As I understand her position, Hampton's metaphysical argument against the propriety of moral hatred—and, I would suggest by extension, of properly focused contempt—is that it assumes a false account of the nature of persons. In the case of contempt, Hampton might suggest, the person who has the attitude must suppose that the fact that a person's character is in some relevant respect appropriately regarded as comparatively low, rotted, or evil means that the person him- or herself is appropriately regarded as low, rotted, or evil. However, Hampton is prepared to deny that the latter is ever the case, with the exception of those extreme and rare instances of what she calls moral death (see Murphy and Hampton, pp. 111, 122, 146). I find it especially odd to argue, as does Hampton, that the morally dead merit hatred rather than the kind of objective attitude Strawson describes. On my view, that an agent is not morally dead is a prerequisite for his being an appropriate object of contempt and the other reactive attitudes. Hampton's Christian-inspired appeal to the decent inner core of a person, a core that is merely shrouded in—not constituted by—the person's character traits, finds its secular expression in Kant's appeal to the noumenal self whose capacity to regulate itself with its own laws inherently merits our respect.

55. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 255 (Ak. 463).

56. Consider, e.g., the abuses to which even "nice" attitudes, such as love, are subject.

57. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 254 (Ak. 462).

However, Kant famously distinguishes between the relative worth of things, which can be traded and have a price, and the intrinsic worth of rational agents, who are irreplaceable and have what he calls “dignity.”⁵⁸ In light of this distinction, the Kantian objection to even properly focused contempt might be that it assesses a person as one ought only to assess a thing.

Although I have acknowledged the possibility that although a person may appropriately be regarded as contemptible in virtue of some character trait there may nonetheless be redeeming qualities that explain another person’s regard for them, my account does not block the possibility that a truly vile character may merit, as we say, “nothing but contempt.” Yet, according to Kant, all rational agents have an equal inherent worth and so merit our respect in a way that mere things do not. Respect for this inherent worth or dignity of persons, Kant suggests, is incompatible with contempt. What is shameful about contempt on the Kantian view is, in short, that it overlooks the true worth, or dignity, of persons as such in favor of adopting toward a person an attitude appropriate only to things.⁵⁹

Although I want to reject the charge that the person who directs contempt at another must be guilty of a category mistake, I nonetheless mean to address the claim that even the most morally reprehensible person merits, merely in virtue of being a person, a form of respect from us. To take first things first, I reject the charge of category mistake because I believe that one may well argue, as does Strawson, that it is in virtue of withholding reactive attitudes that one treats a person thing-like, and properly focused contempt, I have argued, is a reactive attitude. Recall that holding others vulnerable to the reactive attitudes is constitutive of regarding them as free agents capable of aspiring to moral community with us. On one reading, the objection from respect has it that contempt amounts to a rejection of such community. I think to make this objection is to mistake the import of the negative reactive attitudes. Consider, again, Strawson’s distinction between the reactive attitudes and the objective attitude. Strawson writes, in distinguishing

58. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), p. 102 (Ak. 434).

59. In a few places, interestingly, Kant appears to allow that a person may merit contempt. In all these cases, the person becomes contemptible in virtue of failing in his duties to himself. See, e.g., Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1963), “Duties to Oneself,” pp. 116–26, and *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 216 (Ak. 420). It is also worth noting that not all interpreters of Kant feel equally pressed to defend an interpretation of Kantian respect that would make it incompatible with properly focused contempt. The possibility of their compatibility is supported, I think, by readings such as that provided by Dean.

negative reactive attitudes such as resentment and indignation from the objective attitude, that the former

tend to inhibit or at least to limit our goodwill towards the object of these attitudes. . . . But these attitudes of disapprobation and indignation are precisely the correlates of the moral demand in the case where the demand is felt to be disregarded. The making of the demand *is* the proneness to such attitudes. The holding of them does not, as the holding of the objective attitudes does, involve as a part of itself viewing their object other than as a member of the moral community. The partial withdrawal of goodwill which *these* attitudes entail, the modification *they* entail of the general demand that another should, if possible, be spared suffering, is, rather, the consequence of *continuing* to view him as a member of the moral community; only as one who has offended against its demands.⁶⁰

We needn't deny, on my view, that contempt involves a withdrawal of goodwill in order to deny that contempt thereby treats its objects as subjects of treatment (as does taking toward them the objective attitude, i.e., the attitude that they are beyond the scope of the reactive attitudes). It is taking the objective attitude toward others that amounts to treating them in the Kantian sense as objects as opposed to aspiring members in moral community. Regarding another with contempt does not thereby objectify another person; rather, it is regarding him as beneath contempt that signals we have exiled him from moral community with us.

The defender of properly focused contempt, then, no less than the Kantian, can acknowledge that a person does, merely in virtue of being a person, merit a certain regard from others, a form of regard that I believe warrants the title respect. In making this case, I mean to suggest that properly focused contempt can accommodate what I take to be the Kantian's legitimate worries.

The Kantian doctrine of respect for persons, if it is not to be revisionary in a way that Kant himself denies of his moral theory, must make room for the commonplace that respect is something that a person earns. In doing so, it might attempt to make use of a distinction that, in English at least, appears to mark two different senses of respect. For example, if I ask of someone that they "respect my wishes," say to go to work for the tobacco lobby, I may be requesting one of two things. Most likely, I am pleading for noninterference. Perhaps I am explaining

60. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," p. 77. Strawson's views regarding resentment here are not so far from Butler's proposed solution to the question of how resentment could be compatible with the injunction to love one's neighbor. See Butler. Note that I reject Strawson's apparently retributive understanding of these attitudes.

my decision to dad after having listened to a sermon on carcinogens. Less likely, though possibly, I am trying to get my interlocutor to see things my way in order that they might come to appreciate whatever value it is that I take my choice of career to manifest. In the first case, respect is understood minimally, as imposing a constraint on what others may legitimately do to interfere with my decisions and generally demanding of them what is owed me merely as a person. In the second case, something more is being requested, namely, another's evaluative endorsement of my project.

Despite the role that one would assume the distinction must play in any coherent Kantian doctrine of respect for persons, its implications for Kantian moral theory—particularly for how that moral theory is to treat attitudes such as contempt—remain largely untapped.⁶¹ However, Stephen Darwall provides us a place to start in distinguishing between what he calls *recognition respect* and *appraisal respect*.⁶² According to Darwall, recognition respect “consists in giving appropriate consideration or recognition to some feature of its object in deliberating about what to do.”⁶³ In those cases where one gives recognition respect to another person, that just means that one gives the fact that the other is a person serious and appropriate weight in practical deliberation. Of course, just what kind of weight is appropriate is a matter of debate; still, the point remains that in giving recognition respect to another, I acknowledge that the mere fact that he is a person matters for me.

In contrast to recognition respect, appraisal respect “consists in an attitude of positive appraisal of that person either as a person or as engaged in some specific pursuit.”⁶⁴ Appraisal respect thus takes as objects only persons or features of persons “that manifest their excellence as persons or as engaged in some particular pursuit.”⁶⁵ Insofar as one regards the person or features of the person (her philosophical integrity, say) as meriting positive appraisal, one has appraisal respect for the person.

61. I think moral philosophers have become too complacent in assuming that the grounds for the doctrine of equal respect for persons are obvious and that we understand what such a doctrine demands in practice. The most astute, and earnest, investigation of these questions of which I am aware is that of Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), pt. 2. No doubt, in light of my defense of contempt, some readers will conclude that I have not learned the lessons of Margalit's book; if so, the fault is, of course, mine alone.

62. Stephen L. Darwall, “Two Kinds of Respect,” in *Ethics and Personality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. John Deigh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 65–78; originally published in *Ethics* 88 (1977): 36–49.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 67. In addition to taking persons as objects, recognition respect may be directed to “the law, someone's feelings, and social institutions with their positions and roles.”

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*

Although it originates with philosophers, the distinction between recognition and appraisal respect captures the everyday distinction between respect and admiration or esteem. The important consequence of noting the distinction here is that it reminds us that another might merit a form of respect (namely, recognition respect) from us all merely in virtue of being a person despite the fact that he fails to merit our admiration or esteem (i.e., to merit appraisal respect from us). If the Kantian is willing to accept that the form of respect that Kant had in mind in writing that every rational being is an end in itself and, so, a proper object of respect just is recognition respect, then properly focused contempt emerges as compatible with Kantian respect.⁶⁶ Thus, although Camille's experience with Paul represents him as having brought himself low in virtue of some fault of character, and so as an appropriate object of her contempt, she does not therefore regard herself as licensed to do just anything to him. He remains, for all his faults, entitled to recognition respect and she remains—contempt or no—constrained from using him merely as a means.

VII. CONTEMPT AND RESPECT: THE NEED FOR A “DEEP” JUSTIFICATION?

In a pair of lectures on Kantian respect for humanity, lectures that argue that contempt is incompatible with such respect, Thomas Hill, Jr., anticipates an argument similar to the one I have just offered. Hill's objection to employing the distinction between two kinds of respect as I suggest we do is that such an argument “fails to meet the underlying concern of those who wonder *why* they should respect all human beings.” An answer to this question, Hill argues, requires a “deep justification.”⁶⁷

Hill is right that the kind of argument to which I have appealed does not have the deep justification that he is after. While I have suggested that it is in virtue of being a person that one is due a minimum form of regard, recognition respect, in Hill's view this move merely pushes the question further back; for, Hill argues, if we are now using

66. I am not certain that this reading is available to someone who has a stake in remaining an orthodox Kantian. This is because although I am willing to grant that something akin to Darwall's distinction between recognition and appraisal respect can be traced to the Kantian texts (particularly to Kant's distinction between respect [*Achtung*] and admiration [*Bewunderung*])—see, e.g., *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1956), pp. 78–82 [Ak. 75–79]), Kant at times strikes me as no less wary of appraisals involving the latter. Here, however, I take the focus of his worry to be epistemic. (I am indebted here to a comment of Charles Larmore that made me take a closer look at the distinction between *Verachtung* and *Geringschätzung* at work in “The Doctrine of Virtue” and to Faviola Rivera for discussing with me my remaining puzzlement about Kant's views on respect and admiration/esteem.)

67. Hill, “Must Respect Be Earned?” p. 90; emphasis mine.

“person” to denote a moral status, the question becomes one of what entitles one to that status.

If what is required to provide a sufficiently deep justification is some necessary and sufficient condition of personhood, then I suggest that none are likely to be forthcoming. One might well be tempted here to adopt a turn of phrase of Wittgenstein’s: “My attitude toward him is an attitude toward a person. I am not of the opinion that he is a person.”⁶⁸ The question whether another organism is a person—and the difference this makes—is not in my view a theoretical question but is itself a practical one. A similar insight underlies Strawson’s own strategy of appeal to the reactive attitudes to undermine the incompatibilist threat, and my own adoption of that strategy for my purpose here.

Whether the problem concerns personhood or free will, however, someone is likely to object that if the question of whether we owe certain beings recognition respect is merely a practical question, then it is only a matter of time before we fall vulnerable to those—coming as they will in the guise of anti-Semite, Christian Identity member, or what have you—who will decide to deny us admission to the category. If it makes sense to speak of an admirable worry, this is one. However, I continue to doubt that further argument can succeed in easing it. I cannot prove, of course, that there is no argument possible to accomplish this task—appeals to noumenal selves, merely logical uses of reason, and souls sometimes have eased the worry (despite being irrelevant to the threat). Instead, my response to the objection that views such as mine fail in the task of deep justification is to note, briefly, why I believe that responses such as Hill’s own fare no better.

Hill’s deep justification aims to answer three questions: (1) “Why grant to all members of our species, or even to all with certain basic normative capacities, a moral status (of ‘humanity’) that includes the presumption that anyone who has the status should be respected by all?” (2) “Granted that all human beings have a defeasible right to respect as human beings, is there any reason to suppose that they cannot forfeit that right?” (3) “How, in practice, can we defend ourselves, punish criminals, and express our outrage at bigotry and corruption if we must treat all unjust, corrupt bigots with respect?”⁶⁹

Hill’s strategy for answering the first question, and so of providing a “deep justification” of the presumption of respect owed all persons, is one of establishing that our common moral concepts—concepts that we could not abandon without “radical reorientation of our lives”—presuppose a moral framework for deliberation from which we can

68. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), pt. 2, p. 178e.

69. Hill, “Must Respect Be Earned?” pp. 91–92.

derive both formal and substantive requirements of respect for persons.⁷⁰ The moral framework that Hill, following Kant, takes to be implicit in ordinary moral thought is one that conceives of moral deliberation in terms of an ideal of co-legislation among autonomous agents who choose to govern themselves with principles “that all *reasonable* human beings would accept, as justifiable to themselves and others, under certain ideal conditions.”⁷¹

Two Kantian lines of thought are said to establish that such an ideal is implicit in ordinary conscientious thinking. First, there is the thought that conscientious persons, quite independently of their substantive views on moral matters, are committed to the view that they must do that which they judge, “upon full and reasonable deliberation,” they are morally required to do. This commitment just is, Hill suggests, a respect for principles to which any fully reasonable person would conform. Second, because conscientious people regard what they morally ought to do as nonoptional in a way that nonmoral requirements (such as requirements of prudence) are not, the reason why they ought to fulfill moral requirements must accommodate their nonoptional character. Hill glosses this as the requirement that there be “some standards of reasonable conduct, which they count as authoritative for them, that indicate that certain things ought, and others ought not, to be done, and not just because this serves the specific aims and interests that the agent happens to have.”⁷² The Kantian proposal for such standards aims to avoid the problems thought to beset substantive accounts of the relevant standards by invoking a formal criterion for eligible standards: they must be compatible with what agents occupying the ideal deliberative position mentioned previously would accept.

In Hill’s lectures, the satisfaction of this criterion gives rise to both formal and substantive requirements of respect for persons. The formal, or procedural, requirement of respect involves regarding each person as “a potential co-legislator of the basic principles we all must live by.”⁷³ So regarding a person will require that we “*listen* to one another, take seriously the arguments of those who reject one’s initial position, . . . be *sincere* in [our] proposals and *nonmanipulative* in [our] arguments, [aiming] not to gain power through debate but to *convince* others that [our] position is justifiable,” and so on.⁷⁴

This formal principle, in turn, gives rise to more substantive re-

70. *Ibid.*, p. 95. Note the similarity here between Hill’s strategy and Strawson’s argument against the incompatibilist.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

quirements of respect, on Hill's view, when we try to take up the Kantian moral perspective. We can suppose that anyone reflecting from this perspective, Hill argues, "would endorse at least the presumption that every human being is to be respected so far as possible in the substantive ways that we so highly value. Since not all human beings have special skills or unusual merit, compared to others, the respect we presume required cannot be *respect for a person's merit* but rather *respect for a person's position*, which in this case must be just the position of 'being human.'"⁷⁵ This presumption of respect for persons is incompatible with contempt insofar as the latter "is a deep dismissal, a denial of the prospect of reconciliation, a signal that conversation is over." Whereas even "furious argument and accusation" leave room for the possible resumption of communication, "cold, silent contempt does not. The one demands to be heard, while the other walks away in disgust."⁷⁶ The presumption of respect for persons as such, as Hill defends it here, thus is not the minimal notion of recognition respect as I have suggested, that is, the negative requirement that places constraints on our interactions with our fellows. Rather, it is a more positive requirement of an active form of engagement with those fellows. Even properly focused instances of contempt that my view defends as morally permissible, as in the case of Camille, flout the requirement of respect as Hill understands it.

Moreover, Hill argues in response to the second question, that "it seems incredible to suppose that all Kantian deliberators would agree that criminals and other moral offenders can altogether forfeit respect and that therefore we may treat them with utter contempt."⁷⁷ This because, however well off we are in fact, we can recognize that running the risk of becoming the object of such contempt would be too great a risk from any relevant perspective. Hill thus concludes that we all have good reasons to accept principles that prevent the risk of utterly contemptuous treatment of ourselves or others. Moreover, we have most reason to accept these principles because, contrary to what we might suppose, the acceptance of such principles is possible for us and is compatible with our duties to protect ourselves, render just punishment, and protest moral atrocities. That is, what we might have supposed were

75. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 114. Hill's reference to "utter contempt" at times suggests that our difference is merely verbal: that he means to reject as incompatible with respect not what I call properly focused contempt but regarding another as beneath contempt. Indeed, in conversation, Hill has expressed sympathy with my view. The general tenor of his article, however, leads me to believe that Hill has interpreted me too charitably, since the positive engagement that he argues is demanded by proper Kantian respect does strike me as conflicting with the contempt I defend. Hence, my attempt to come to terms with Hill's argument here.

overriding reasons to reject such principles are, given Hill's answer to his third question, not reasons for rejection at all.

In response to Hill's argument, I acknowledge that even properly focused contempt may signal that "conversation is over." If I am right, however, about the attitude being compatible with forgiveness in response to the kind of change of character sufficient to make amends for the relevant moral fault, then it need not amount to "the denial of the prospect of reconciliation." Of course, in some cases—cases such as that of Stangl, perhaps—it will. Note, however, that I do not deny that even a Stangl is owed recognition respect. But such negative constraints on what I am permitted to do with or to him are, I suggest, all that such a person is owed. It is an admirable thing, perhaps, that Sereny, in being willing to carry on the conversation in his case apparently was instrumental in bringing about his change of heart. But I suggest that no one morally owed this to him, least of all his victims. Hill's positive respect of engagement is precisely what I think such a person forfeits. Properly focused contempt thus emerges on my view as a kind of gatekeeper for admission to the other reactive attitudes. It is a signal that our demand for moral community has been flouted and forebodes the adoption of an objective attitude in the absence of any evidence that the demand has hope of being met.

Is the prospect of such contempt too great for co-legislators of basic principles to risk? I'm not sure I know how to decide that question, and, again, I doubt that its answer addresses the threat of inhumanity to others any better than does my own nonanswer. In response to such a question, I find myself wanting to say that were the optimism about humanity that would encourage one to offer a positive answer to the question justified, then the answer would not in practice matter because what had been "risked" would never come to pass. That is, if the thought driving one's choice of such principles were the thought that no actual human being deserves to be so treated—and so we cannot reasonably risk being so treated—then a positive answer is an easy one to give. The history of the human race thus far, however, provides a rich cast of characters of whom such optimism is, I'm afraid, naïve. And if such characters are among my co-legislators, then I can only hope that the majority vote goes my way.

VIII. CONCLUSION

I have argued that, with the conditions discussed herein in place, properly focused contempt can be a morally justified response to persons who manifest a bad moral character. A natural question to ask at this point is whether such contempt is not merely morally justifiable but, perhaps, morally required in certain circumstances. Although I cannot defend such a requirement here, there remain considerations, I think,

that weigh in favor of a conclusion stronger than the one I argue for here: the conclusion that a failure to regard certain vicious characters with contempt may itself amount to a vice.⁷⁸

Might properly focused contempt be something we morally owe to ourselves? Consider the arguments of philosophers such as Strawson and Murphy that reactive attitudes such as resentment are intimately connected with the values of interpersonal regard and self-respect.⁷⁹ In Murphy's case, the link between resentment and self-respect cautions against a simplistic attitude toward forgiveness. "A too ready tendency to forgive," Murphy argues, "may properly be regarded as a *vice* because it may be a sign that one lacks respect for oneself."⁸⁰ The thought here is that a person who does not experience resentment but instead is able to overlook or immediately forgive wrongs done her must thereby ignore her rights or underestimate her worth and so not take her rights seriously. In those cases where properly focused contempt is a response to a wrong done to oneself, contempt manifests the same connection with the value of self-respect as does resentment. Contempt rather than resentment may constitute a defense of one's own self-respect in cases where it demonstrates the victim's full appreciation of how the character of the object of her attention violates the (recognition) respect that is her proper due. In Camille's case the connection between contempt and self-respect is particularly acute because Paul's character flaw itself manifests a lack of (recognition) respect for her. Not only is properly focused contempt an appropriate response to certain cases of moral failure, on such a view, it is a response, moreover, that may be required by a proper respect for ourselves and our moral ideals.

Might properly focused contempt be something we morally owe to others? With regard to the object of contempt, my argument embraces a claim that has the ring of paradox: contempt, that apparent antithesis of respect, might itself be a sign of respect for its object. If respect, for a Kantian, is the appropriate response of my own rational nature to other instances of rational nature, then might not respect for rational nature as such require that I regard with contempt another's deliberate violation of rational nature (be it her own or that of another)?⁸¹ Not only might properly focused contempt be compatible with recognition

78. The argument that contempt is morally required in certain circumstances will inherit a greater burden in addressing the question why the judgment that so-and-so is contemptible is insufficient.

79. See, e.g., Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," pp. 71–72; and Murphy and Hampton, pp. 16–19.

80. Murphy and Hampton, p. 17.

81. The possibility of such a response to the Kantian worry about respect occurred to me in thinking about J. David Velleman's Kantian-inspired defense of love as a moral emotion ("Love as a Moral Emotion," *Ethics* 109 [1999]: 338–74).

respect, it might be that recognition respect for another requires that one regard that person as subject to reactive attitudes that include contempt. Whether or not this satisfies the Kantian, it seems that there is a sense in which the very fact that I regard someone with properly focused contempt implies that I respect him. I hope to have put Strawson's lesson to good use in going some way toward muting the paradoxical ring of this claim. Of course, one might object to my attempt to rally his lesson in support of contempt as a form of respect by noting that the objective stance is not the exclusive alternative to regarding someone as a potential object of contempt. Though true, the objection has nothing to offer it, I think, unless it can bring some independent objection against contempt in favor of an alternative reactive attitude. However, if I am correct in what I have argued here, no other reactive attitude fits the bill.

I don't expect these pages in defense of contempt as a moral attitude to have quelled all lingering doubts. The fact remains, however, that although moral philosophers have remarked how attitudes such as resentment and indignation are essential to our moral practices, they generally have neglected the place that superficially less palatable attitudes such as contempt have to play in those same practices. At the very least, then, I hope to have succeeded in introducing as a topic of further debate a reactive attitude that warrants the attention of the moral philosopher.

Moreover, I have attempted to establish that with the conditions discussed herein in place, properly focused contempt is a morally justifiable response to bad moral characters. Although there are those who would have us limit our focus in moral evaluation to a person's acts—and thus perhaps attempt to banish contempt in favor of act-focused attitudes such as resentment and indignation—I believe this would constitute an impoverishment of our moral psychological repertoire. The impoverishment would come from our losing our ability to mark the fact that, to return to Paul and Camille, the significance of Paul's urging on his wife a certain car ride lies less in what the act itself amounts to than in what it says about him in the context of his relationship with her. If we value, as I suggest we should, the ability to interpret our actions and those of others as—quite literally—forms of self-expression, then we have one reason to lament the absence of a moral attitude, such as I have argued properly focused contempt is, that expresses our assessment of such a one as he.

Finally, if contempt has the role as a moral attitude that I have suggested it has, then I believe we are warranted in concluding that an enlightened morality need not be a gentle morality. Although I have counseled against contempt's possible abuses, there is nothing gentle

in even properly focused contempt. If a justified morality can countenance contempt, then there is no guarantee that that morality is likely to be gentle. I leave it to the defenders of genteel enlightenment, among others, to show where such a view goes wrong.