

# The good fit<sup>1</sup>

Vida Yao

Rice University

**Correspondence**

Vida Yao, Rice University.

Email: [vidayao@gmail.com](mailto:vidayao@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Philosophers are now wary of conflating the “fittingness” or accuracy of an emotion with any form of moral assessment of that emotion. Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson, who originally cautioned against this “conflation”, also warned philosophers not to infer that an emotion is inaccurate from the fact that feeling it would be morally inappropriate, or that it is accurate from the fact that feeling it would be morally appropriate. Such inferences, they argue, risk committing “the moralistic fallacy”, a mistake they claim is widespread throughout the work of contemporary and historical moral philosophers. I argue that many basic and familiar forms of moral assessment of the emotions are not subject to these arguments. I illustrate this by reconsidering the idea that to assess an emotion as “fitting” is to assess it as what a virtuous person would feel. After showing how assessments akin to this “virtue-theoretical” notion of fit may be prevalent even outside of the Aristotelian tradition, I suggest some more charitable and philosophically productive interpretations of the philosophical views of the emotions that D’Arms and Jacobson criticize, and argue that we cannot coherently theorize about the fittingness conditions of the emotions in a morally neutral way.

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## 1 | I

What kind of endorsement is involved in a judgment that an emotion is an “appropriate” response to what it is about? In answering this question, Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson (2000) warned moral philosophers, in a now-canonical paper, not to conflate two “logically distinct” forms of endorsement or assessment: the “moral propriety” of an emotion on the one hand, and its “fittingness”, or representational accuracy, on the other (71). Having drawn this distinction, they argued that any philosopher who infers directly from claims about the moral appropriateness or inappropriateness of an emotion to conclusions about the representational accuracy or inaccuracy of that emotion should be eyed with suspicion. Such a philosopher may be guilty of “*the moralistic fallacy*”: she is either committing a fallacy of equivocation, or (and more importantly), failing to see that a moral reason for or against feeling an emotion is *irrelevant*, or, in the jargon of our time, that it is “the wrong kind of reason” to determining its fit, just as it would be irrelevant to determining the truth of a belief. Consider two examples they use to illustrate their arguments. One might infer from a moral demand that one not grieve for one’s spouse because of the harm it will do to one’s children, to the conclusion that therefore the death of one’s spouse isn’t a sorrow. Or that because it would be morally wrong to be amused by a racist or a sexist joke, that the joke is therefore not funny. It’s clear that there is something amiss in both cases.

D’Arms and Jacobson deemed this mistake to be both remarkably widespread throughout the work of moral philosophers, and “moralistic” because the persistent tendency to make this error could perhaps be best explained by a moralistic unwillingness to accept the ambivalence of maintaining that an emotion could be both morally wrong to feel, but nonetheless accurate (2000, 75). We may call to mind the trope of a person who, in her righteousness, is unable or unwilling to be amused by a funny but demeaning joke – her emotional life stunted by the harping demands of morality. And philosophers, it seems, have been duly chastened by these warnings. The distinction between judging an emotion as “the right way to feel” and judging it for “get[ting] it right” or as “fitting” (2000, 66), is now, by and large, dutifully acknowledged by both moral philosophers and philosophers who work on the emotions, and questions about the epistemic appropriateness of an emotion are taken to be conceptually isolatable from questions about its moral appropriateness.

At risk of seeming both moralistic and conceptually confused, I will argue that it is perfectly legitimate to infer from a claim that an emotion is morally appropriate or the right way to feel, in a specific and important sense, to the claim it is “getting it right” – that is, that it is accurate, *and* that it is perfectly legitimate to infer from a claim that an emotion is morally inappropriate to feel, again in a specific and important sense, to the claim that it is inaccurate. These inferences do not depend on committing any of the mistakes that constitute “the moralistic fallacy”. And I am not conjuring them out of thin air: they are familiar in our everyday lives, and furthermore, any philosopher drawing on an Aristotelian conception of virtue and vice can make them. While D’Arms and Jacobson consider and then reject this particular proposal, and while contemporary philosophers have, by and large, accepted their rejection of it, I will show that their distrust of this conception of emotional fit is grounded in certain distortions of the relationships between virtue, vice, and emotional accuracy on this picture.

But my central aim here is not to defend the Aristotelian virtue theorist against the charge that she is guilty of the moralistic fallacy. My concerns are broader. An insistence that moral philosophers, including but not limited to those influenced by Aristotle, are guilty of either equivocation or conceptual confusion in inferring between moral assessments of the emotions and assessments of the accuracy of those emotions, or vice versa, requires its own set of equivocations. It involves

reading into those views claims that their authors need not be making, and theoretical ambitions that they may not have. Moreover, the apparent ubiquity of the moralistic fallacy need not be a manifestation of *morality* reaching beyond its proper domain, as D'Arms and Jacobson suggest. Instead, it may result from projecting *a certain conception of morality* onto all recognizably moral or ethical outlooks.

The significance of recognizing D'Arms and Jacobson's interpretive overreach is not merely exegetical: it has greater implications for current and future philosophical work on the emotions. Given wide acceptance of D'Arms and Jacobson's arguments, and their conclusion that the traditional moral-philosophical focus on the "propriety" of emotional response is fundamentally misguided and "obscures rather than advances" (2000, 88) our studies of the emotions, we may rob ourselves of distinctive and promising ways to conduct both moral psychological research on the emotions and moral philosophy that those outlooks can afford, if only understood on their own terms. To insist that such views illegitimately *conflate* epistemic and moral assessment is to not only to risk misunderstanding them, but to also deny them – and us – a basic and compelling moral-philosophical insight which is a hallmark of such positions, and which runs directly counter to D'Arms and Jacobson's central, and now widely endorsed conclusions. That insight is that to feel one's emotions accurately is *both* an epistemic and moral achievement, and so, to assess an emotion as fitting is to endorse it *both* epistemically and morally. Thus – most significantly – we unjustifiably inhibit and constrain forms of both moral psychology and moral philosophy that rely on basic idea that one cannot come to feel "the right ways" without also seeing and being devoted to the right things.

## 2 | II

Because the term "fittingness" has now acquired a fair amount of philosophical baggage, it is important to remind ourselves of the particularities of the concept that D'Arms and Jacobson were originally discussing. I will separate these features into two: first, the distinctive aspects of "fittingness" as a form of emotional accuracy, and second, the background meta-ethical project which animates their discussion of this notion of fit and comes to inform its content.<sup>2</sup> Their conception of emotional fit, in abstraction from this meta-ethical project, is compelling: the examples I mentioned earlier, about grief for one's dead spouse, or the wrongness of being amused by an offensive joke, seem to illustrate, starkly, our need for it. And it is also compelling for some reasons that D'Arms and Jacobson only partially articulate. One stems from their commitment to a general view of the emotions which denies that emotions are simply brute or blind feelings. As philosophers working in moral psychology and philosophy of mind now commonly acknowledge, emotions have intentional content and they present their objects in certain ways, and we ought to be able to do justice to the idea that we can evaluate them on their own terms: for whether or not they are presenting their subject with an accurate or inaccurate evaluative perspective on what they are about.<sup>3</sup> And less theoretically, we are all familiar with cases in which we know that an emotion we are feeling is one that – for either prudential reasons, or moral reasons – it might be

<sup>2</sup> Whether or not this sense of "fit" has anything to do with other philosophical senses of "fit", is not directly relevant to my arguments here. For discussion of these different senses of fit in the context of a project of unification, see Howard (2018). I am skeptical of the coherence of such a project, and its underlying methodology.

<sup>3</sup> The theorists of the emotions they believe rely on something like this notion of fit (whether to be further understood in terms of judgments, beliefs or evaluations) include de Sousa (1987), Greenspan (1988), Roberts (1988), and Solomon (1976).

better that we didn't. We are also likely familiar with being *told* not to feel some way rather than another with injunctions that can sound coldly instrumental or irritatingly moralistic: "Don't be sad, it doesn't help the situation."; "Don't be disgusted by the tripe, it's a delicacy in their culture."

In failing to recognize the difference between moral reasons and reasons of fit, we may even begin to imagine a world where certain reasons come to entirely dominate our emotional lives – monstrous scenarios in which one must feel exactly what a utility calculation or an evil demon would demand without due recognition of the distinct, seemingly non-moral and non-prudential value of having an accurate emotional response to the world. Or we might imagine situations in which we simply anesthetize ourselves against feeling certain emotions – grief, rage, or despair, for example – because of how painful they are or because of how badly they interfere with our plans, and (again, monstrously or at least inhumanly) conclude that there really would be nothing lost by our doing so.<sup>4</sup> So, implicit within this standard picture of fittingness is the compelling hope to lend our emotions their own rational standing – and thereby perhaps, their own dignity and value – able to conflict and compete with both prudential and moral reasons.

These are all points that I am broadly sympathetic to, and philosophers who work on the emotions, either as moral psychologists or as philosophers of mind, may find that something akin to this form of emotional assessment is indispensable to our ability to model and understand the emotions, and their significance, on their own terms. And D'Arms and Jacobson's points about how assessing an emotion for its accuracy is distinct from assessing it morally are compelling when they consider the idea that an emotion could be "fitting" (that is, accurate), while nonetheless running afoul of imagined moral demands which take either a (roughly) consequentialist or (roughly) deontological form. Moral psychologists, in particular, would do well to take those points seriously. But D'Arms and Jacobson's arguments begin to lose their force once we reconsider another way of morally assessing an emotion – one that should not be understood as taking the form of either a consequentialist or deontological assessment of an emotion.

Partly, this is because D'Arms and Jacobson's notion of fit is wedded to the *meta-ethical* project that they are responding to. This is what they characterize as the "neo-sentimentalist" hope to "analyze" evaluative properties in terms of fitting emotions – ambitions now exemplified by contemporary "fitting attitude theories of value." Though they begin their discussion as though it were simply at the level of theorizing about the emotions, these meta-ethical ambitions inform and bolster D'Arms and Jacobson's arguments against a "moralized" notion of fit, as well as their contention that the mistakes that constitute the "moralistic fallacy" are widespread through moral philosophy. But whether their arguments for these conclusions are successful depend upon whether such ambitions are in fact shared by the positions and claims about the emotions they are critical of. I will show that they neither are nor must be.

Keeping these details in mind, let us now reconsider D'Arms and Jacobson's arguments. According to D'Arms and Jacobson, the fit of an emotion can be understood as analogous to the truth of a belief. Assessing an emotion for its fit, like assessing a belief for its truth, is just to assess it for its representational accuracy. When it comes to an emotion, they suggest, this is a matter of assessing whether the evaluative property it presents something as having in fact obtains. For example, it is a matter of whether the object of one's *contempt* is in fact *contemptible*, the object

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Stephen Wilkinson's (1999) discussion of grief which allows for this possibility partly because he views emotions (understood as anything beyond the beliefs and desire that may partly constitute them) as intrinsically non-rational, thus ruling out the idea that there are distinctive "fitting" reasons of grief specifically, and the emotions more generally.

of one's *fear* in fact *fearsome*, etc.<sup>5</sup> And they suggest that this kind of assessment is one that we observe within our everyday discourse with one another. It is one familiar way, among other ways, that we criticize and assess our own emotions and the emotions of others.

D'Arms and Jacobson proceed to argue that moral philosophers systematically *conflate* fittingness with *moral* assessments of the emotions. Such philosophers commit what they label "the moralistic fallacy": "Put most simply, to commit the moralistic fallacy is to infer, from the claim that it would be wrong or vicious to feel an emotion, that it is therefore unfitting" (2000, 69). Again, their examples of grief and amusement mentioned earlier, paired with a consequentialist or deontological claim that in such cases, the emotion in question would be morally wrong to feel, illustrate their argument most forcefully. D'Arms and Jacobson also argue that philosophers often use these fallacious inferences to rule out certain emotions – such as anger, jealousy, or envy – as never accurately representing their objects, because they are always morally objectionable to feel. For example, they write:

Gabrielle Taylor expresses sympathy for the thought that anger might be systematically wrong to feel, on the grounds that "it is wrong to be so concerned with what is due to one"... Unfortunately, Taylor takes this moral objection to feeling anger as a demonstration that "anger... should be classed among those emotions which one is never justified in feeling"... By 'justified', she means warranted or fitting... But even if it's wrong to be so concerned with one's due, this does not show that anger isn't fitting – only that one [morally] ought not to feel it. (2000, 79).

As I'll discuss in the next section, this strikes me as a strained reading of the thought that Taylor is alluding to. But before proposing alternative interpretations, I will first reconsider in some detail what, exactly, "the moralistic fallacy" is. This is because the simplest or most "blatant" version of the fallacy – and what we may have been, on a more cursory reading of D'Arms and Jacobson's arguments, convinced to be wary of – is not, as they acknowledge, always, strictly speaking, a fallacy; nor is that the heart of their objection to such inferences.

Rather, they argue that when fully spelled out, such inferences rely on arguments that make one of what I will distinguish as two different mistakes. One mistake is to claim that the moral badness, wrongness, or viciousness of feeling *F* is what *makes* *F* inaccurate. This would be like claiming, implausibly, that the moral badness of believing something could be what *makes* that belief false. But, at least on a common understanding of truth, what makes a belief false is that it fails to correspond to reality. Likewise, what makes an emotion inaccurate is that it fails to correspond to reality, not the moral badness or wrongness of feeling it. A second, related mistake is to think that because one should not feel *F* because it would be morally wrong to feel, that this reason not to feel *F* is relevant to establishing the conclusion that *F* is inaccurate. But this would be a mistake because only *evidential reasons*, and not *moral reasons* (here implicitly understood as *practical reasons* to feel or not feel the emotion), are relevant to establishing that *F* is fitting, or unfitting. In other words, should one want to argue that either a belief or an emotion is inaccurate, one should marshal *evidence* – not practical injunctions against believing it, or feeling it, respectively.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For reasons that I won't elaborate on here but allude to below, this picture of emotional accuracy is misleading if it encourages us to think that objects simply possess or do not possess certain evaluative qualities in ways independent of context and interpretation, in the way they might be understood to possess color, shape or size.

<sup>6</sup> They present this as one mistake, but I think it is better to distinguish them from one another, to avoid interpreting their argument as claiming that evidence is what *makes a belief true*.

My disagreement with D'Arms and Jacobson is not with their claims that these are mistakes. Rather, the important points are, first, that neither form of argument is as widespread as they claim and, second, that the reason why D'Arms and Jacobson are convinced that they are so widespread is because of a more basic failure to take seriously at least one conception of fit that they explicitly reject. As I will show, they encourage us to read these mistakes into, rather than off of, certain philosophical positions, leading to both distortion of those positions and to the mistaken conclusion that the authors of such positions are employing bad forms of argumentation.

To do this, I will consider D'Arms and Jacobson's discussion of a "virtue-theoretical" conception of fit, while granting here that their arguments are compelling in response to either basic consequentialist or deontological moral assessments of the emotions. D'Arms and Jacobson suggest that out of the moral-theoretical positions they consider, the virtue theorist offers what may seem to be "the most compelling version of moralism" (2000, 84). This is partly because the virtue theorist can avail herself of a broader understanding of "morality" or ethics, understanding a virtuous person as appropriately related, and emotionally attuned, to goodness in all of its forms. Such a theorist could allow, for example, that it may be *virtuous* (that is, a sign of or expression of one's wit) to be amused by a funny joke that also hurts someone's feelings, and that, a virtuous person who, as John McDowell (1978) suggests, has no inclination to "sleep with someone he ought not sleep with" would nonetheless have a "vivid appreciation" of the pleasures of doing so (27). Thus, this approach to moral philosophy is less liable to result in objectionable forms of moralism in general, at least when understood as a point of view that (among other things) fails to be sufficiently pluralistic about value.

But D'Arms and Jacobson are nonetheless skeptical that the virtue ethicist can avoid committing the moralistic fallacy when inferring between moral assessments of an emotion and assessments of fit. As an exemplification of a virtue-theoretical conception of fit that would license such inferences, they consider a classic proposal from Richard Brandt:

[T]o say that 'X is the fitting object of Y' is to imply, if not assert, that X actually would arouse Y in the 'ideal man' – the man with the accepted or approved scheme of values and personality structure. (2000, 84; Brandt 1946, 116)

D'Arms and Jacobson's response to this proposal can be understood as consisting in two stages. First, they argue that it cannot be the case that the virtuous man always feels his emotions accurately. As they write:

[The] virtue of courage... is a matter of weighing the risks against the stakes, so as to act well (and perhaps also, as Aristotle has it, to act with proper feeling). When the stakes are great enough, however, and the brave warrior faces a battle that simply must not be lost, fear seems to have no contribution to make to right action. Given the attractions of an (Aristotelian) ideal of a person whose feelings and motives are in harmony with his actions, we think that the best thing to say about such cases is that the brave warrior is unafraid, even though this is a genuinely fearful situation. But then standards of virtue will call for avoiding an emotion that is granted to fit. (2000, 85)

In response, we can begin by noting that this is not Aristotle's conception of courage. According to Aristotle, courage is the intermediate state between cowardice and rashness that governs both fear and feelings of confidence or boldness. Now, it is true that in a battle that cannot be lost, in

which he is likely to lose his life, the brave man will be “fearless”, in some sense. This is because he is buoyed by his emotions of confidence, felt in response to his belief (correct, assuming Aristotle’s “scheme of values”) that his death in this crucial battle would be something *fine*, or *noble*, or *excellent*, and so, not genuinely fearsome. Importantly, it is not that, because of an instrumental practical reason (that in order to pursue a fine death) he *suppresses* his fear. His death itself, in this context, is less *fearsome* because it would be so excellent – and this is what the virtuous man is aware of, and which his emotions are accurately responsive to. Even so, Aristotle notes that the brave or courageous man will still be “pained” at the thought of losing his life (indeed, even more pained than the rest of us because his life is such an excellent one to lose). But nonetheless he will *stand firm* against this pain or fear, given the excellence of either glory in victory or glory in death.<sup>7</sup>

The point here is not to simply point out that Aristotle has a different understanding of courage from D’Arms and Jacobson. The point is that he has a different conception of *virtue*. On this conception, virtue is *partly constituted* by emotional accuracy. To have the virtue of courage or bravery, is, among other things, for one’s emotions to be accurately responsive to what things are worth and not worth fearing. Emotional accuracy is not just a necessary condition of virtue, understood as consisting in something else (such as the disposition to perform right actions). Rather, it is part of the *ideal* of virtue that one experiences one’s emotions in such a way that they are sensitive to reality (which of course includes evaluative reality). The “continent”, or “self-controlled” person is able to do what the virtuous person does at one level of description (e.g. stay in the battle rather than fleeing), but he does not perform a *courageous* action, nor is he a *courageous person*, precisely because his emotions are not accurate. Nor does the merely *confident* person, who feels no fear because he mistakenly thinks that no harm could in fact befall him, count as courageous or as performing courageous actions. Thus, the fear or pain that a brave person feels *does* in fact contribute to virtuous action, because of what this ideal of bravery consists in. Given this ideal, Aristotle remarks that if all you wanted was a man who is a good soldier because he did not fear the dangers of war, a virtuous man would not, in fact, be the right man for you.<sup>8</sup>

D’Arms and Jacobson do not take this relationship between emotional accuracy and virtue seriously. They suggest that they cannot understand why someone would suggest that the virtuous person continues to feel fear, writing: “...denatured of any behavioral outlet, such an emotion would be a mysterious free wheel in the virtuous person’s psychology” (2000, 85) Why, they ask, “posit these *useless* and *potentially disastrous* emotions?” (2000, 85, my emphasis). But to ask this question is to already assume an instrumentalization of the emotions that a defender of this conception of virtue should reject. According to the Aristotelian, for actions, “done in accord with the virtues to be done temperately or justly it does not suffice that they themselves have the right qualities. Rather, the agent must also be in the right state when he does them” (Aristotle 1999, 1105a30). This is not because the “right state” is a *means* to the performance of the virtuous action. Rather, it is because it is part of what it is for an action to *be* virtuous that the virtuous agent is in the right state when he does it, at least on this picture. And it is one of the attractions and distinguishing features of an Aristotelian framework that it refuses to hold as either more primary, or as of exclusive moral significance, the importance of “proper action” over proper emotion.

<sup>7</sup> There is some question whether the “pain” that Aristotle describes in the discussion of courage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* should be understood as the pain of fear, but one could make this argument using his discussion of fear in the *Rhetoric*.

<sup>8</sup> “But presumably it is quite possible for brave people, given the character we have described, not to be the best soldiers. Perhaps the best will be those who are less brave, but possess no other good; for they are ready to face dangers, and they sell their lives for small gains,” (Aristotle, 1999, 1117b18).

Of course, one may disagree with this conception of virtue. As D'Arms and Jacobson write, "virtue's primary commitment must be to proper action and its secondary commitment to feeling what to feel" (2000, 85–86). With this *alternative* view of virtue in mind, it *would* be fallacious to infer that an emotion a "virtuous" person would feel is thereby accurate, because this view does not build into the very ideal of virtue that one's emotions are felt accurately. But it is not legitimate for D'Arms and Jacobson to attribute this alternative conception of virtue to a moral philosopher who simply does not hold it, and then accuse *her* of fallacious inference. That depends on an equivocation between two different conceptions of virtue – one that the Aristotelian virtue theorist may be committed to, and one that she should reject.

One could take a different tack and argue that Aristotle is simply mistaken in not recognizing just how fearsome one's own death is, and that the accurate amount of fear to feel toward it in a risky battle is not something that could be moderated by one's confidence that, in that context, it would be excellent or fine. Some things, one might insist – lions, tigers, death in battle – are simply appropriate, because correct, objects of fear. Indeed, if one is more skeptical of the value of martial glory than Aristotle was, one is likely to reject his conception of courage. But it is important to see here that this is a disagreement with Aristotle's "ideal set of values"; it is not a claim that he is guilty of conflating two distinct forms of emotional assessment.

And to emphasize that this virtue-theoretical notion of emotional "fit" is *not* one that could be understood as excluding moral or ethical content, note the significance of seeing that it incorporates a judgment about what "scheme of values" is the ideal, or correct one. Any competing view of what objects truly merit fear that one might think should be substituted for Aristotle's will not be ethically *neutral* – other moral theorists with different value commitments may object to it. While it may sound morally or ethically neutral to insist that bears and dying in battle merit fear given that they are in fact fearsome, this is true only given substantive and contestable ethical commitments about what things are in fact, good (e.g. physical safety) and bad (e.g. the loss of one's life or limb).

D'Arms and Jacobson are aware that a virtue ethicist, skeptical of their discussion, may insist, "that the distinction between questions of fit and questions of propriety is somehow undermined by proper appreciation of the standards of virtuous feeling" (2000, 85), as I think it is. But they then turn to a second stage of argumentation and reiterate what they take to be their central challenge to any "moralist's" account of fit. They write,

... it is not the virtuousness of feeling F that makes it [accurate] (or the viciousness that makes it [inaccurate]), even when both claims are true. Virtue and vice, like right and wrong, are red herrings in this dispute. Some other features of the circumstances make F [accurate], and these features would make that emotion [accurate] whatever one thought about its [moral] propriety... (2000, 86)

But there is no need to read the virtue theorist as claiming that the virtuousness of feeling F *makes* F accurate. While a defender of some form of neo-sentimentalist analysis of evaluative properties or other "fitting-attitude" theory of value may need to commit to this claim, the Aristotelian need not.<sup>9</sup> It is perfectly coherent, and plausible, for her to claim, instead, that if an emotion is what a virtuous person would feel, it is also accurate, and that what

<sup>9</sup> One diagnosis for what has happened here is that the Aristotelian proposal they consider is Richard Brandt's, who they *also* take to exemplify the neo-sentimentalist program (2000, 69–70). But to belabor the point, there is no reason to attribute the ambitions of that program to the Aristotelian more widely.

makes it accurate is that the evaluative property it presents some object as having in fact obtains. This would be like maintaining that if a belief is one that an ideal believer would hold, it is true, but not because the fact that an ideal believer would hold it *makes* it true. Rather, such a belief would be true because it accurately represents the world. Crucially, we should not allow the meta-ethical ambitions of neo-sentimentalism (or other meta-ethical projects, in general) and the formal constraints they demand, to distort our understanding of a robust ethical theory, and then criticize this theory for commitments it need not be making.

With this conception of virtue in mind, we see that an Aristotelian may legitimately infer that if an emotion is what a virtuous person would feel, it is accurate, and that if an emotion is inaccurate, it is not what a virtuous person would feel.<sup>10</sup> In endorsing an emotion F toward X as “fitting”, she is endorsing it as both accurate *and* what a virtuous person would feel toward X; there is no *conflation* of moral and epistemic assessment here, as the assessment is simultaneously moral and epistemic.

Neither should we read the virtue theorist as offering, for example, the viciousness of F as a *practical reason* not to feel the emotion in question, and so offering a reason that is irrelevant, or the wrong kind of reason, to determining whether that emotion is accurately felt. There are more plausible interpretations of why claims about virtue and vice, or more generally, “what kind of person” one would be to feel a specific emotion (2000, 66) are part of both our philosophical and everyday reflections about whether or not an emotion is accurate. Consider, for example, when we criticize a person’s guilt as *self-indulgent*, his sadness as *sentimental*, or his envy as *petty*. In such cases, we can understand these claims as making either one of two moves that conjoin ethical assessment of an emotion with an assessment of its accuracy. One possibility is that the claim that the emotion F is *sentimental* or *what a sentimental person would feel* just entails the claim that the emotion is inaccurate, given that sentimentality is partly constituted by being disposed to feel F in certain inaccurate ways.<sup>11</sup>

Alternatively, we can understand such claims as being offered as *evidence* that the emotion in question is inaccurate. To see this second possible interpretation, consider the famous example of Iris Murdoch’s M coming to reflect on her daughter-in-law, D.<sup>12</sup> Here, M reflects on the object of her hostility, disdain and contempt – the seemingly vulgar and noisy D. But being self-critical and well-intentioned, M enjoins herself to reconsider how she sees and feels about her daughter-in-law. She could, of course, reflect on the evidence that she has that D really is vulgar and noisy. But her reflection instead incorporates thoughts about herself, and she uses concepts that again,

<sup>10</sup> It wouldn’t license the inference that an emotion is thereby *vicious*, as there could be other explanations for why it is that an emotion fails to be virtuous.

<sup>11</sup> Consider, for example, Joel Feinberg’s (1982) discussion of sentimentality: “Sentiment is more commonly criticized as ill-fitted to its object. The inappropriateness can be either qualitative, as when one is filled with radiant joy at the perception of another’s misfortunes, or quantitative, when the sentiment is of the right kind but is either excessive or deficient in the circumstances. In either case what is often labelled “sentimentality” is either a sentiment rooted in false belief, or a false belief (sometimes called a “sentimental belief”) itself the product of a distorting sentiment. . . . Sentimentality about small children. . . produces the conviction that all tots and urchins are perfect little angels, a sentimental belief that can blind one forever to the evidence of experience. The death scenes of children in Victorian novels could be moving enough in a natural way, but when the dying child is endowed with preternatural nobility, amazingly adult dignity, wisdom, and every moral virtue, the scenes notoriously become so sentimental that only the deluded can be moved at all” (28-29).

<sup>12</sup> Murdoch’s (1970) work is inspired by Plato rather than by Aristotle, but both of these traditions share the basic point that coming to see reality and feeling emotions is both epistemically and morally significant and in a way that cannot be disentangled or purified into two distinct assessments.

conjoin ethical or moral assessment with epistemic assessment: “M tells herself: ‘I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again’” (1970, 17).

Though M is engaged in form of moral deliberation about her emotions, she is *not* asking herself, “What would be morally *right* for me to feel?”, or, “What am I morally *obliged* to feel?” Nor is she thinking, “It is snobbish of me to feel so much disdain for D, and I ought not be snobbish, so I ought not feel disdain.” Rather, she is deliberating by considering her own character traits, which are themselves constituted by tendencies to distort her perception of reality, and therefore her emotions. She is, reasonably, considering the idea that given her conventionality, jealousy, and potential snobbishness, she is liable to feel emotions toward D that are not accurate, using these moral considerations about herself as *evidence* that her emotions do not fit their object.<sup>13</sup> Either reading would be a more natural interpretation of moves between claims about character flaws or vice to claims about emotional inaccuracy, and they may be prevalent not only in the moral philosophical reflection of virtue theorists, but also in our everyday moral discourse and self-reflection, as well.

### 3 | III

I’ve argued that the most promising “moralistic” conception of emotional fit that D’Arms and Jacobson explicitly consider is one that allows for inferences between moral assessments and assessments of accuracy which are not, in fact, guilty of any version of the moralistic fallacy. The assumptions that give rise to the impression that it is are assumptions that, I’ve argued, are being read into and not off of Aristotelian virtue ethics.

But this discussion was simply an illustration of a more general point. The prevalence of something approximating this notion of fit should encourage us to *resist* interpreting other philosophers as committing the moralistic fallacy, even when the textual evidence is scant or ambiguous. There are two reasons we should adopt this more charitable approach even when the philosopher in question is not one who herself explicitly espouses or is an advocate of Aristotelian virtue ethics. First, as I’ve suggested, virtue ethics theorizes certain forms of ordinary, everyday emotional criticism which bring character assessment and assessments of accuracy together, and which allow us to use a person’s character traits as evidence toward forming a conclusion about whether or not they are feeling an accurate emotion. It is only fair to think that a philosopher may have something like this ordinary form of emotional assessment in mind. Second, other philosophical traditions also conjoin moral assessments and accuracy assessments of the emotions in just the way I’ve discussed.

To see this, return now to D’Arms and Jacobson’s discussion of Gabrielle Taylor’s suggestion that anger may be systematically inaccurate, because it is wrong “to be so concerned with what is due to one” (2000, 79; Taylor 1975, 401–2). Again, D’Arms and Jacobson interpret Taylor as though she is claiming that the moral wrongness of being so concerned with what one is due is *the reason why* anger is always inaccurate, and they present this claim as a paradigmatic example of the

<sup>13</sup> Compare M’s deliberation with the kind of moral deliberation that D’Arms and Jacobson have in mind: “... reflection on the fittingness of an emotion can be more effective in governing our actual feelings than is moral or prudential reflection. Prudential considerations, especially about fear or anxiety, are often counterproductive: and *moral considerations can induce guilt without alleviating the offending emotion*” (D’Arms and Jacobson 2000, 73, my emphasis). I will come back to their particular understanding of “the moral” in the conclusion of this article.

moralistic fallacy. I noted earlier that I find this reading strained, though it's true that this is one interpretation available to us. But there is another, more straightforward and familiar interpretation of the line of thinking that Taylor may be imagining here. It is "wrong" to be so concerned with what one is due because (assuming a particular "scheme of values") what others owe you is, in fact, *not of genuine importance or value*. In other words, one would be mistaken to think that getting what one is due is something good. Because anger (on Taylor's cognitivism about the emotions) always involves a belief that not getting what one is due is something *bad*, one would be mistaken *whenever* one is angry.

My aim here is not to defend this view of anger, but to show that this interpretation is more philosophically productive than concluding that it falls prey to the moralistic fallacy. For example, in response to this view, one could argue that some forms of anger do not involve a belief or construal about the goodness of getting one's due, or that it is in fact good, at least sometimes and in the right contexts, to get what one is due. In the first case, we will have a *substantive moral-psychological disagreement* about what anger consists in; in the second, we will have a *substantive moral-philosophical disagreement* about what things are in fact good and worthy of concern, and what things are not. It is more productive, and crucial to understanding and engaging with robust forms of moral-philosophical thought, to locate a disagreement at either of these levels than to simply see the argument as a confused form of reasoning expressive of a moralistic mind.

In a more recent article, D'Arms and Jacobson encourage interpreting moral philosophers and "other spiritual figures" as illicitly bringing the wrong kind of reason to bear on questions of emotional accuracy when we disagree with a conception of an emotion that they defend (2014, 240). But this interpretive suggestion would wreak havoc on our understanding of these rival philosophical positions, while also misleading us about the potential sources of our potential disagreement with them. For example, they consider Robert C. Roberts's (2003) conception of compassion, which proposes that all suffering merits compassion, regardless of whether or not that suffering is deserved. For Roberts, "compassion is a construal of some person or other sentient being as being in distress." (295). D'Arms and Jacobson argue that this analysis of compassion is mistaken, because the true fittingness conditions of compassion would rule out as unfitting compassion felt for those whose suffering is deserved because brought about by their own moral wrongdoing. They suggest that we interpret Roberts as bringing "the wrong kind of reason" into his analysis by mistakenly presenting a Christian injunction to feel compassion toward all, or the idea that the "best way to live" involves pitying all suffering, as relevant to compassion's accuracy. They propose that "...many of Christ's teachings – like those of many spiritual figures – are better understood as [offering the wrong kind of reason not to feel the emotion]. They set an ethical standard for how to feel, rather than expressing norms of fittingness," (2014, 240). They give as another example the Christian "admonition to respond to a transgression against oneself by turning the other cheek" (2014, 240). Here too, they propose that since "transgressions are precisely what merit anger", the injunction should be understood as expressing an "ethical standard of how to feel" rather than a claim about the accuracy or inaccuracy of anger (2014, 240).

This proposal requires uncharitable interpretations of both Roberts, and Jesus. We should leave open a more natural interpretation of this view of compassion, which better characterizes how a Christian, ideally, *sees the world*: such a view claims that we all – frail worms of the earth that we are – merit compassion. This includes sinners, who are perhaps *especially* worthy of compassion, given how (according to a set of Christian value claims) their sins have made them *even worse off* than the rest of us. They are in distress; their wretched state is what renders it *fitting* to

feel compassion for them. Those of us who fail to feel compassion for sinners because they are sinners are *both* epistemically and morally imperfect, at least from the perspective of this ethical outlook. (And, interestingly, if the reason why we don't feel compassion for them is because we think they deserve their suffering given their moral wrongdoing, those who endorse this outlook might worry that *our* moralism has distorted *our* representation of the situation.) Similarly, if a Christian philosopher, or person, were to suggest that you should "turn the other cheek" when someone cuts you off in line at the store, or shouts a slur from across the street, or throws a brick through your window, a natural interpretation is not to think that they are offering you a moral injunction against feeling anger which has nothing to do with the conditions under which anger is fitting. Rather, they may be offering a new way to see and so feel about these events more *accurately*.

There are different interpretations of what that this kind of proposal could amount to. For example, one could argue that anger felt toward such transgressions is unfitting because anger implies that one is looking down upon an offender, when in fact one lacks the status that would justify this kind of perception. Or one could argue that anger is a response to transgressions experienced as threats to one's *social* status, but that one's social status is not of true or genuine worth, and so unworthy of one's concern. As Robert Adams (1999) writes of "spiritual figures" from philosophical traditions such as Buddhism, Epicureanism, Stoicism, and aesthetical Christianity: "...[they hold] that some kind of detachment from particular finite goods deserves a place in our motivational ideal, as necessary for spiritual freedom *and for the right kind of orientation toward what is truly good*" (208, my emphasis). Not the "right" kind of orientation because it satisfies some other, *independent* moral or ethical standard of rightness, but because it is more accurate *and* more ethically or morally ideal to love and be emotionally devoted to what is truly good, than what is a mere illusion or finite appearance of goodness. On such views, an "ethical standard of how to feel" and "norms of fittingness" cannot be treated as two logically distinct forms of assessment: the ethical standard of how to feel just is a standard of accuracy.

Again, my point isn't to defend specific views about compassion or anger, but rather to emphasize the alternative interpretive possibilities that emerge once we take seriously the possibility that moral considerations in such theories are considerations of accuracy and not practical injunctions to feel or not feel the emotion in question. We could disagree with these views by denying their accounts of the thoughts or construals constitutive of compassion or anger, or by denying that to commit sin is to be in a more pitiable state, or by insisting that one's social status or getting what you are due is, in fact, something worthy of concern. In a Nietzschean mood, one could argue that the whole system of values presupposed by the Christian outlook I've discussed expresses the distorted worldview of deeply resentful weaklings unable to bear the reality of their situation. But this, too, would be to mark one's disagreement with such views as being moral or ethical in nature, and not a matter of their simply relying on irrelevant, or the "wrong kind" of reasons in their characterizations of the fittingness of the emotions.

#### 4 | IV

It is worth concluding by reflecting on the domain of the "moral" within D'Arms and Jacobson's discussion, and within discussions about the fittingness of the emotions more generally. D'Arms and Jacobson finish their essay by emphasizing that someone who believes that they

are claiming that moral considerations are *never* relevant to fit is misconstruing their argument. They write, "...we are not claiming that there are no circumstances under which some moral consideration is relevant to the fit of an emotion" (2000, 87), and their explication of this point reveals just how they are thinking of what characterizes "the moral". The exception, they write, is for emotions that are "moral in shape", by which they mean emotions which draw on "the fundamental moral concepts" such as "desert", "fault" and "responsibility" (2000, 87). According to this distinction, anger and guilt are "moral emotions", while emotions such as shame and envy are not. Thus a "moral" consideration such as the fact that an action was *wrong* will be relevant to *anger's* fittingness, or *guilt's* fittingness, given that they are "moral emotions". Presumably then, the fact that one's envy would be *petty* is either irrelevant to the fittingness of one's envy or is (strangely) not a "moral" consideration; the fact that one is descended from a line of unrepentant slaveholders and segregationists is either irrelevant to whether it would be fitting for one to feel ashamed of one's heritage or is (again, strangely) not a "moral" consideration.

It's important that we not misconstrue the kind of considerations that I have characterized as, because not "moral" in D'Arms and Jacobson's restricted sense, not moral in any other. For example, those convinced that the moralistic fallacy is as ubiquitous as D'Arms and Jacobson suggest may also be sympathetic to the idea that to assess an emotion for its accuracy is to level a *purely* epistemic assessment of an emotion, conceptually isolatable from *all forms* of moral assessment.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the idea that reasons of fit are cleanly separable from other kinds of reasons (for example, that they are epistemic *rather than* moral or prudential in nature) has become, partly through D'Arms and Jacobson's arguments, a familiar aspect of a now standard philosophical picture. According to that picture, there are separable and distinct "normative domains" of reasons – epistemic, prudential, moral, aesthetic, etc. But that image of a cleanly segmented normative world can not only distort existing philosophical views, but the more holistic ways in which we actually assess and evaluate ourselves and our emotions.<sup>15</sup>

This standard picture can itself encourage ways of thinking that will encourage us to interpret the ethical views I've described in ways that will render them less interesting and less philosophically promising than they may in fact be. So I want to conclude by speculating about two other tendencies within the literature of emotional fittingness that encourage the mistaken impression that to assess an emotion for its accuracy is to assess it in a *purely* epistemic manner. The first involves a carefully limited selection of what emotions, and what paradigms of inaccurate emotions, philosophers tend to use to illustrate their notions of emotional accuracy and inaccuracy. Perhaps the most commonly used example is the emotion of *fear*, but as I've suggested, fear can be too easily reduced to a perception of *physical danger*. This encourages the impression that we can simply give a morally or value neutral account of what is in fact physically dangerous to human beings, using, for example, a combination of biological and statistical facts. And common

<sup>14</sup> D'Arms and Jacobson discuss cases in which an emotion is both morally criticizable *and* unfitting for the very same reason, such as being outraged by a colleague getting tenure, even though her tenure is well deserved (and so not "outrageous"). But even so, D'Arms and Jacobson nonetheless treat the epistemic and moral assessment of the outrage as two *distinct* assessments of the emotion – it is unfitting *and* it is morally wrong, where one reason grounds two distinct assessments. I am defending the idea that to judge an emotion as unfitting is to already judge it both epistemically *and* morally – there need be no separate moral claim in addition to the judgment that one's outrage in this case is unfitting for this to be a moral assessment of one's outrage. It isn't what a virtuous person would feel. (Again, whether or not it is what a *vicious* person would feel will depend on more details of the case, such as whether one feels that one's outrage is justified.)

<sup>15</sup> Again, consider the criticism of *sentimentality*: a sentimental novel is aesthetically flawed, but this assessment is simultaneously a moral and epistemic criticism as well.

examples of paradigmatically unfitting emotions throughout the literature involve mistaken non-evaluative beliefs or construals, such as the belief that mice are (physically) dangerous, or that one is likely to die in a plane crash, or that the tigers have in fact escaped from the enclosure. This careful selection of examples can encourage the impression that the fittingness of an emotion can be assessed independently of any substantive ethical view. But I've suggested that it is a mistake to think that when we are providing the "fittingness" conditions of the emotions, we could do so in an ethically or morally neutral manner. It would be misguided to think that we should strive to state, that as a matter of *non-ethical fact*, bears are worthy of fear while mice are not, and that all moral theorists, no matter what else they are committed to, must respect these "extra-ethical" starting points. Again, assessments of what is worth fearing may *appear* to be morally neutral and unconditioned by value, but they are not: we are taking for granted in this judgment, after all, the value of not being mauled or killed. And as I've argued, some disagreements about the accuracy of an emotion are often best understood as ethical or moral disagreements about what sorts of concerns one should have, given what things are in fact good and what things are not.

If we fail to recognize this, we may be unjustly suspicious that we, or others, are bringing "the wrong kind of reason" to bear on questions of emotional accuracy, and that moral philosophers who provide accuracy conditions of the emotions that include moral considerations and are themselves a form of moral assessment are, as D'Arms and Jacobson charge, *thereby* hindering our understanding of those emotions (2000, 88). In the midst of this suspicion, we may rob ourselves of insightful judgments and intuitions we have about when emotions are and are not fitting – intuitions and judgments which are themselves conditioned by our own values. We will not only fail to recognize the source of our disagreements over conditions of emotional appropriateness, but also fail to understand that the implicit moral or ethical commitments that give rise to these disagreements are, after all, moral or ethical commitments. We should not, I am insisting, *rid ourselves* of those judgments or intuitions or attempt to completely abstract from the values that give rise to them. We should instead see them for the morally and ethically conditioned claims they are and proceed, philosophically, from there, engaging in the kind of *ethical* reflection about our values that, as I've suggested – and I worry – certain meta-ethical ambitions (here, the meta-ethical ambitions of neo-sentimentalism or value "analysis") can not only distract us from, but make seemingly incoherent. More generally, while many contemporary meta-ethicists and moral philosophers implicitly assume that it is a philosophical virtue to remain as neutral as possible when it comes to one's first-order commitments until one's meta-ethical position is settled, this has become dogma that deserves far more scrutiny than it currently receives.<sup>16</sup> What are the central terms and concepts, for example, that will and should form our sense of the "ethical" or the "moral"? And how could we possibly identify what these are and have the sense that they are worth our attention *without* directly considering the values that they depend upon, and which of those values deserves our allegiance?<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Consider Iris Murdoch's (1970) observations that philosophical pictures which attempt to be morally or ethically neutral are nonetheless expressions of a moral or ethical outlook – even if proponents of such views would deny this.

<sup>17</sup> My point here is similar to one expressed by Bernard Williams' (1985) concerns about the destructive tendencies of certain moral-theoretical ambitions, including some that would be, by our contemporary lights, "meta-ethical":

Theory looks characteristically for considerations that are very general and have as little distinctive content as possible, because it is trying to systematize and because it wants to represent as many reasons as possible as applications of other reasons. But critical reflection should seek for as much shared understanding as it

The second tendency that encourages the mistaken impression that the accuracy of an emotion is a purely epistemic matter results from a view of what moral philosophy and moral thought consist in, and so what “moral assessment” of an emotion could possibly consist in. These commitments include that morality is legalistic in form and primarily concerned with obligation and duty, right and wrong, “fault”, “desert”, and “responsibility”; its central emotions are blame and guilt; and – perhaps most fundamentally – that a moral reason “as such” is a practical reason to *do something* (i.e. to *feel* something, in this context) because morality is fundamentally about *what we ought to do*. But this is precisely the picture of morality that many moral philosophers who emphasized the moral or ethical importance of the emotions and character – including but of course not limited to Aristotle – have resisted.<sup>18</sup> This restriction of the scope of the “moral”, combined with the first tendency I mentioned to resist or at least delay direct ethical reflection on our values, leaves us liable to simply assume a narrow, thin, and incomplete conception of what morality could be. With this assumption securely in place, we fail to take seriously the possibility that the domain of the moral cannot be domesticated in this way: that moral considerations, expansively understood, underlie and are entangled with what may initially seem to be our most basic, non-moral (i.e. aesthetic, prudential, epistemic) commitments.

Allow me to reiterate my central, and what should be my least controversial, point: it is one thing to be wary of fallacies and mistakes committed by those who endorse certain moral philosophical views (such as consequentialism or deontology) or who strive to fulfill certain meta-ethical hopes (such as the hope to “analyze” or “reduce” evaluative properties to assessments of emotional fit). It is quite another to insist that moral philosophers, no matter what commitments they have or which particular concepts they use, are guilty of the same fallacies and mistakes, simply because they are in the business of “moral philosophy”. And an insistence that “genuine” morality must be limited to the central concepts and concerns of specific views such as deontology or consequentialism, that it must be about practical *rather than* theoretical reason (and that these can be understood dualistically in the first place), or that it is fundamentally or exclusively concerned with questions about *what to do*, may reflect an over-simplification of moral philosophy and moral theory – one that may itself be an expression of the moralistic thinking which can distort and inhibit more promising modes of ethical thought.<sup>19</sup>

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can find on any issue, and use any ethical material that, in the context of the reflective discussion, makes some sense and commands some loyalty. Of course that will take things for granted, but as serious reflection it must know it will do that. The only serious enterprise is living, and we have to live after the reflection; moreover (though the distinction of theory and practice encourages us to forget it), we have to live during it as well. Theory typically uses the assumption that we probably have too many ethical ideas, some of which may well turn out to be mere prejudices. Our major problem now is actually that we have not too many but too few, and we need to cherish as many as we can. (116–117)

<sup>18</sup> As Bernard Williams (2006) writes, “Kantianism and consequentialism, despite their other differences (about free will, for instance), resemble each other, as Iris Murdoch has insisted, in sharing a concern with the practical” (54).

<sup>19</sup> “A moralistic conception of morality... can lead us to say: *this* (whatever it may be) is what moral thinking in essence is; all else it not *really* moral thinking,” (Diamond, 228).

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