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RESEARCH ARTICLE

On the fittingness of agential evaluations

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According to a leading view, emotions such as admiration, contempt, pride, and shame are important vehicles of agential development. Through admiration and contempt, we establish models and countermodels against which to shape our character; through pride and shame, we get a sense of how we measure up to them. Critics of this view object that these emotions always deliver uncompromising evaluations: admiration casts people in a completely positive light, while contempt casts aspersion on them. Therefore, insofar as they lack the capacity for nuance, these emotions are systematically unfitting and misleading. This paper discusses this objection as originally formulated by Doris (2002) as well as Bell's response (2011, 2013). Drawing from research on emotional intentionality, it will be argued that Doris' and Bell's accounts are respectively misguided criticisms and inadequate defences of these emotions. Their mistake lies in an invalid transition from the claim that these emotions are intentionally directed towards persons to the claim that they deliver global evaluations of those towards whom they are directed. By rejecting this inference, it will be shown that these emotions can deliver nuanced and fitting evaluations in a way Doris' objection overlooks and Bell's response precludes us from articulating.

Keywords: moral psychology; agential evaluations; emotions; fittingness; fittingness objection; character

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1. Introduction

When we are struck with admiration for our favourite tennis player, we are not simply motivated to *act* like them, but to *be* like them, to acquire those same skills that allow for the proficient execution of masterful shots. Similarly, when we feel in the grip of shame after having once again failed to keep a promise, we are not simply motivated to *act* differently, but to *be* different, to eradicate those traits that underlie our unreliable conduct. It is in this sense that emotions like admiration, contempt, pride, and shame are often claimed to be forms of agential evaluation: they evaluate agents *for who they are* rather than *for what they do*. Through admiration and contempt, we establish models and countermodels against which to shape our character and our abilities; through pride and shame, we get a sense of how we measure up to them. Observations like these have led several moral philosophers and moral psychologists to conclude that admiration, contempt, pride, and shame – when fitting[1] – can be valuable vehicles of agential development.

According to some, this requirement for fittingness is precisely never met. Therefore, these emotions cannot be those valuable means of agential development that they are commonly taken to be. An important argument in favour of this view has been advanced by John Doris (2002). According to this objection, emotions such as pride and admiration cast people in a thoroughly positive light which portrays them as flawless exemplars, while emotions like shame and contempt cast people in a completely negative light which depicts them as possessing nothing but flaws. However, Doris presses, nobody possesses only positive or only negative traits, so emotions such as admiration, contempt, pride, and shame will be systematically unfitting. Therefore, he concludes, these attitudes ought to be avoided since, lacking the capacity for nuance that would be needed to yield fitting evaluations, they are systematically misleading.

A natural reply to this objection consists in claiming that, while these emotions do deliver global evaluations, they do not portray persons as admirable or contemptible *in all respects* – contrary to what Doris claims – but as admirable or contemptible *all things considered*. Therefore, admiration for those who are imperfect and yet all things considered admirable can, after all, be fitting. This view has been defended by Macalester Bell (2011, 2013) and, to some, it may seem sufficient to close the case on the fittingness of agential evaluations. The aim of this article is to show that this reply is wanting and that both detractors and defenders of these emotions have made a mistake in thinking about the psychology and the normativity of these attitudes. Drawing insight from research on the intentionality of the emotions, it will be argued that Doris' and Bell's accounts are respectively misguided criticisms and inadequate defences of these emotions. The mistake besetting both views lies in an invalid transition from the claim that these emotions are intentionally directed towards persons to the claim that they deliver global evaluations.[2]

Although both Doris and Bell are right to insist that we admire *persons* and not their traits or their skills, this does not *ipso facto* preclude us from claiming that our admiration portrays those we admire as admirable in one respect and not in another. There is indeed a plausible sense in which we may admire someone as a tennis player but not as an academic. For such a token of admiration to be fitting, then, it is sufficient that the admired person be admirable as a tennis player regardless of whether they are, for example, an admirable academic or an all things considered admirable person. Building on these observations, it will be shown that these emotions can deliver nuanced and fitting evaluations in a way Doris' objection overlooks and Bell's response precludes us from articulating. Developing this view will in turn indicate an important avenue which research on these emotions should pursue if we are to fully appreciate how admiration, pride, shame, and contempt can be valuable vehicles of agential development.

2. Actional and agential evaluations

Aretaic evaluations are assessments of excellence or defect in a person's agency, namely assessments involving the attribution of virtue, vice, skill, or incompetence. These evaluations can be divided into *actional evaluations* and *agential evaluations*. The former are directed towards actions: to judge that Susan acted kindly or skilfully is to consider that *Susan's action* exemplifies some aretaic property. The latter are directed towards agents: to judge that Susan is kind or skilled is to think of *Susan herself* as possessing some aretaic property.[3] Philosophers disagree over the exact relationship between actional and agential evaluations, in particular when they involve virtue. Some argue that a courageous act necessarily proceeds from an agent's courage (Aristotle *NE*; Hursthouse 1999); others deny this, claiming instead that an act can be courageous regardless of whether the agent who performed it is courageous or not (Thomson 1996; Hurka 2006). There is nonetheless agreement on the existence of this distinction and on its import. Actional evaluations pertain to the quality of one's actions and are more closely related to the guidance of one's conduct; agential evaluations pertain to the quality of one's character and abilities and are thus more closely related to their development.

The distinction between actional and agential evaluations does not only apply to evaluative judgments involving the attribution of an aretaic property: it extends to other evaluative attitudes such as the emotions, which are commonly understood as evaluations of the object towards which they are directed. For example, fear apprehends its intentional object as dangerous, amusement apprehends it as amusing, anger apprehends it as offensive and so forth (Goldie 2000; Roberts 2003; Deonna and Teroni 2012; Tappolet 2016). Some emotions constitute forms of actional evaluation insofar as they apprehend some aretaic property essentially related to actions. Consider for instance resentment, which apprehends the moral disvalue of ill-willed actions perpetrated against us (Strawson 1962; Mason 2003), or gratitude, which apprehends the moral value of good-willed beneficial acts done in our favour (Manela 2016; Darwall 2019). These emotions evaluate agents' actions as virtuous or vicious in light of the affects, intentions, and motives underlying the action towards which they are felt. Other emotion types are forms of agential evaluation. This has been argued to be the case for admiration (Zagzebski 2015, 2017; Kauppinen 2019), for contempt (Mason 2003; Bell 2013), for pride (Fischer 2012; Kauppinen 2017), and for shame (Teroni and Bruun 2011; Carlsson 2019). Admiration and pride respectively apprehend excellence in others and in ourselves, while contempt and shame respectively apprehend others and oneself as falling considerably short of some important standard. These emotions deliver evaluations of an agent's deeper psychological structure such as their skills or lacks, their virtues and vices, and their attachment to some value or the realisation of some ideal.

The difference between emotions delivering actional evaluations and those delivering agential evaluations can be further elucidated through the contrast between guilt and shame. Both guilt and shame are forms of negative self-evaluation, but while guilt is best thought of as an actional evaluation, shame is best thought of as an agential evaluation (Teroni and Deonna 2008). This view neatly dovetails important theoretical and empirical observations concerning the psychology of these emotions. Guilt being necessarily action-directed can be explained by the fact that this emotion apprehends an evaluative feature only actions may bear, namely wrongfulness. Guilt's observed action tendencies, namely reparation, can then neatly be explained as a response called upon by one's having *done* something wrong. The same can be done for shame. Shame being necessarily directed towards persons – and more specifically towards oneself – can be explained by the fact that shame apprehends disvaluable features only persons can bear, namely vices and other personal flaws. This claim is supported by the observation that shame motivates us, in the long run, to undergo character reform – a response called upon by one's exemplification of vice or other agential shortcomings.

Note that the distinction between actional and agential evaluations does not only apply to guilt and shame, it seamlessly carries over to other emotion pairs (Kauppinen 2019). Where resentment apprehends vice in the actions perpetrated against us and disposes us to retaliate against them, contempt apprehends persons as vicious and disposes us to dissociate ourselves from them (Mason 2003; Bell 2013). Where approbation apprehends virtue in actions and disposes one to praise them, admiration apprehends excellence in persons and disposes us to emulate them (Zagzebski 2015; Wilson 2017). In other words, if emotions like gratitude, resentment, and guilt evaluate agents *for what they do*, emotions like admiration, contempt, pride, and shame evaluate agents *for who they are*.

3. Double trouble for agential evaluations

If many moral philosophers and moral psychologists have praised the role of agential evaluations in the context of agential development, some have raised suspicion about these attitudes – in particular when they come in the form of emotions such as admiration, contempt, pride, and shame. There are at least two independent arguments that can be advanced in favour of this claim, both seeking to conclude that agential evaluations are never fitting and, therefore, misleading. The first argument targets almost all agential evaluations by raising an ontological challenge; the second argument raises a psychological challenge which only targets agential evaluations taking the form of emotions such as admiration, contempt, pride, and shame. Let us consider these arguments in turn.

The first argument draws strength from the appeal of antirealism about character spearheaded by situationists. Situationists deny the existence of broad character traits as traditionally conceived, for instance kindness or cruelty. While some situationists do not deny the existence of narrower traits such as kindness-at-office-parties (Doris 2002, 65–66), others seem to be skeptical even about narrowly individuated traits (Harman 1999, 326). On this last view, if character traits do not exist, then judgments and emotions which involve the attribution of any kind of trait will be systematically unfitting and misleading. This line of reasoning can be schematised as follows.[4]

Aretaic Error Theory

P1: If agential evaluations are sometimes fitting, character traits exist.

P2: Character traits do not exist.

C: Agential evaluations are never fitting.

The first premise relies on a commonly agreed upon link between some psychological attitudes and certain conditions the fulfilment of which make said attitudes fitting. It is fitting to believe that p if and only if p is true (Wedgwood 2002; Shah 2003; McHugh 2012, 2014) and it is fitting to fear x if and only if x is dangerous (Broad 1954; Pitcher 1956, D'Arms and Jacobson 2000a, 2000b). There are important disagreements as to how to understand the idea that an attitude is fitting, but philosophers agree on the fact that a mental state being fitting amounts to that mental state being properly related to its intentional object in the familiar sense in which there is something wrong with believing what is false or with admiring despicable persons. From these claims, it can straightforwardly be derived that the fittingness of an agential evaluation that involves the attribution of a character trait presupposes the existence of the relevant character trait. A belief that someone is kind is fitting if and only if that person is, indeed, kind. If character traits do not exist, then all agential evaluations which involve the attribution of said traits are unfitting.

The second premise stems from experimental work in social psychology suggesting that agents' actions are mostly or even completely determined by situational factors such as one's mood rather than by some deep, stable, and coherent psychological dispositions (Doris 2002).[5] These results have been taken by some to indicate that character traits do not have any explanatory or predictive power in the context of action rationalisation and that, therefore, it is reasonable to assume they do not exist. Consequently, the practice of attributing character traits to agents – in particular when we do so to explain their actions – is fundamentally misguided (Harman 1999). This claim has not failed to attract criticism, in particular with regard to the way in which the notion of a character trait is understood and operationalised by some moral philosophers and social psychologists, but also with respect to the weakness of the evidential support in favour of these claims (Kamtekar 2004; Fleming 2006). Nevertheless, if its premisses are true, Aretaic Error Theory quite clearly establishes the systematic unfittingness of all those agential evaluations that involve the attribution of a character trait.

The point which Aretaic Error Theory tries to establish – and which many situationists are primarily concerned with – is that, if character traits do not exist, then no one deserves to be admired or contemned for them.[6] More closely related to our concerns, however, is another problem raised by Aretaic Error Theory. The problem is that, if character traits do not exist, then not only will all the agential evaluations that involve the attribution of a character trait be unfitting and misleading, but there will also be no sense in which these judgments or emotions can shape our character since, according to Aretaic Error Theory, there is no such thing as character and, therefore, no sense in which agential evaluations shape it (cf. Harman 1999, 328). Now, the issue with Aretaic Error Theory is that it straightforwardly denies that of which character realists and defenders of agential evaluations are deeply convinced, namely that character traits exist. This argument therefore does not offer a viable path for the advancement of this debate.

The second argument does not encounter this difficulty. Contrary to Aretaic Error Theory, which rests on the dispute between character realists and antirealists, this argument does not need to deny the existence of character traits in order to establish a similar conclusion. The gist of the argument is that agential evaluations, and more precisely agential evaluations coming in the form of emotions such as admiration, contempt, pride, and shame – henceforth 'agential emotions' – are not capable of nuance: they cast a totally positive or totally negative light on the person towards whom they are directed. So, even assuming that character traits exist, agential emotions would be systematically unfitting since no one possesses only positive or only negative traits (Doris 2002, 167–168). The argument proceeds as follows.[7]

Fittingness Objection

P1: Agential emotions focus on whole persons.

P2: If agential emotions focus on whole persons, then they are fitting if and only if a person is admirable, contemptible, etc. *in all respects*, i.e, every aspect of that person is admirable, contemptible etc.

P3: No one is admirable, contemptible, etc. *in all respects*.

C: Therefore agential emotions are always unfitting.

Note that this argument does not target all agential evaluations: it exclusively targets agential emotions. After all, beliefs can have a fine-grained evaluative content. Tom can believe that Susan is kind at office parties or boastful at family gatherings and, as previously noted, some situationists do not deny the existence of narrowly individuated positive or negative traits which may make one admirable or contemptible in some specific respect. Therefore, agential evaluations taking the form of evaluative judgments can be fitting.

The problem mainly arises for agential emotions. According to proponents of this argument, agential emotions are not capable of this sort of nuance. For instance, if Tom admires Susan, his admiration will present her as *totally* admirable, namely as possessing exclusively admirable traits. If this is true, then the argument quite plausibly shows that admiration is never fitting insofar as no one is admirable in all respects. If agential emotions truly lack the ability to deliver nuanced and fitting agential evaluations, then not only will they be largely undeserved, as Doris worries, but it will also become dubious that these emotions can have a positive role to play in the context of agential development. For instance, according to Kauppinen (2019, 25), the globality of admiration can and often does lead us to emulate those we admire not only in respects in which they are admirable and thus worthy of being emulated, but even in unrelated and possibly negative respects. This, in turn, casts doubt on the value of these attitudes.

Let us consider Fittingness Objection's premisses more carefully. P1 is the claim that agential emotions are *person focussed*. In Doris' terms, 'our emotional responses often seem to take in the person as a whole – we love a person, not numbers 5, 32, and 91 on a list of local traits' (2002, 167). Like Doris, many claim that emotions like admiration, contempt, pride, and shame are directed towards persons rather than towards their traits.[8] This premise is very plausible. After all, when we contemn someone, it is *the person* who is apprehended as being contemptible and it is *the person* that our contempt disposes us to dissociate from. It is bizarre to claim that we contemn traits, for instance arrogance, and that contempt poises us to dissociate from said trait.[9] It is important to stress that by 'person focus' Doris does not simply mean that these emotions are intentionally directed towards persons rather than towards their traits, but also that '[e]motions in the neighborhood of disdain, contempt, and disgust […] are associated with global assessments of character, casting aspersion on the person taken as a whole' so that 'it sounds a little odd to say you disdain me in some regards but not others' (2002, 167). This point is paramount as it motivates the claim made in the argument's second premise.

The claim in P2 has already been briefly introduced: since contempt for x presents x as contemptible, contempt is fitting if and only if x is contemptible. According to Doris, since contempt presents persons as *totally* contemptible, contempt towards x is fitting if and only if x is contemptible *in all respects*. This point is particularly clear since Doris (2002, 168) claims that even in cases where the contemned person predominantly possesses traits which make them contemptible, as long as one possesses one positive quality, contempt will be unfitting. This suggests that, according to Doris, agential emotions evaluate the person towards whom they are directed as admirable or contemptible *in all respects.* In other words, admiration presents persons as possessing exclusively admirable traits, while contempt presents them as possessing only and exclusively contemptible traits. In order for admiration, contempt, pride, and shame to be fitting, then, those towards whom these emotions are directed must be perfectly virtuous or completely vicious. P3 plausibly denies that this condition is ever met and, therefore, agential emotions are never fitting. Given the plausibility of the third premise, the only way of rejecting Fittingness Objection is to reject P1 or P2.

An important answer to Fittingness Objection has been proposed by Macalester Bell, who invites us to accept P1 and reject P2. According to Bell, Doris is right in saying that agential emotions are directed towards persons rather than towards their traits, that these emotions cannot be felt towards persons in specific regards, and that they deliver global evaluations of character. She insists on these points by claiming that agential emotions 'take as their intentional objects *whole persons*', that they 'resist "compartmentalization"', and that they have a 'permeating quality' (Bell 2011, 457). While agreeing with Doris on these points, Bell disagrees with Doris' understanding of the sense in which these emotions deliver global evaluations. Where Doris understands agential emotions as positively or negatively evaluating agents *in all respects*, Bell understands them as positively or negatively evaluating agents *all things considered*. To evaluate someone as contemptible *in all respects* is to present them as possessing exclusively contemptible traits; to evaluate someone as being contemptible *all things considered* is to present them as being contemptible as a whole by taking into account all of their traits and their relative importance, while allowing for the presence of some positive or neutral qualities. More precisely, Bell's view (2011, 459) is that agential emotions deliver all things considered evaluations which take into account the relative importance of each of the target's traits, some of which will be 'evaluatively prioritised', i.e., they will be presented by agential emotions as mattering more than others in the 'overall assessment of the target'.

The claim that agential emotions deliver *all things considered* rather than *in all respects evaluations* is supported by the compelling intuition that it remains rational to contemn someone while recognising that that person may possess some positive trait. If Doris were right, it would be irrational to judge that someone has some positive trait while continuing to contemn them. However, as Bell (2011, 460) remarks, learning that someone we contemn is not contemptible in all respects does not rationally urge us to change our attitude towards them. This leads her to reject P2, which her discussion suggests should be reformulated in the following way.

> P2*: If agential emotions focus on whole persons, then they are fitting if and only if a person is admirable, contemptible, etc. *all things considered.*

The revision in P2* integrates the insight according to which agential emotions provide *all things considered* rather than *in all respects* evaluations. Note that, according to Bell (2011, 463), overall admirability and contemptibility are relative properties since they partially depend on the relationship between the subject and the object of an agential evaluation. For instance, if Archie and Bertie are both professional tennis players and their friendship is based on this aspect of their lives, tennis skills and good sportsmanship can be *justifiedly* prioritised, i.e, they can *rightly* be taken by Archie to have increased weight in Berties's overall assessment and vice versa. Therefore, Bertie may be all things considered admirable for Archie, but not for other people, since other relationships may not warrant the same prioritisations. This implies that it may be fitting for Archie to admire Bertie – provided that Archies's admiration prioritises Bertie's tennis skills and good sportsmanship in its overall evaluation – but not for others.

Supposing that Fittingness Objection's P2 is false, then, the argument can immediately be blocked. This view has the advantage of preventing a simple revision of the argument. More precisely, a defender of Fittingness Objection could accept that P2 is false and that P2* is true, but they may insist that a corresponding revision of P3 grants the validity of the argument and allows it to establish its original conclusion C. The revision consists in changing P3's 'in all respects' qualification to 'all things considered' as done below.

P3*: No one is admirable, contemptible, etc. *all things considered*.

This revision grants the validity of the argument, but to accept P3* is *ipso facto* to fall back into the original problem encountered when considering Aretaic Error Theory, namely that P3* straightforwardly denies something of which many character realists and defenders of agential evaluations are deeply convinced. Therefore, neither Fittingness Objection nor its revised version featuring P2* and P3* can establish that agential emotions are systematically unfitting.

4. Two blind spots in the solution

Bell's view comes with two important advantages. The first is that it can block Fittingness Objection and its most obvious revision. The second is that it provides a positive and principled specification of the fittingness conditions of agential emotions. Despite these advantages, this view must be resisted. This is because Bell's account is beset by two blind spots that any psychologically plausible and normatively intuitive theory of agential emotions must be able to avoid. The difficulty in question is exacerbated by the fact that these two blind spots are respectively generated by the same two claims which allow Bell to reject Fittingness Objection. The first is the claim that agential emotions always deliver all things considered evaluations of those towards whom they are directed. Let us call this the 'evaluative claim'. The second is the claim that agential emotions are fitting if and only if the person towards whom they are directed is admirable, contemptible, etc., all things considered. Let us call this the ‘normative claim’. As we shall see, the evaluative claim precludes us from accounting for some familiar cases of admiration, contempt, pride, and shame, while the normative claim precludes our making certain intuitive fittingness verdicts.

Let us start with the evaluative claim, namely that agential emotions always deliver all things considered evaluations of those towards whom they are directed. This claim is partially motivated by the fact that agential emotions take persons as intentional objects: we admire and contemn *other people* and we feel proud and ashamed of *ourselves*, but we do not feel these emotions for traits or for actions. This point, as we have seen, is quite uncontroversial and is supported by independent arguments related to these emotions’ evaluative and motivating dimensions. Crucially, Doris and Bell both seamlessly transition from the claim that agential emotions necessarily take persons as intentional objects to the claim that agential emotions necessarily evaluate persons *as a whole* – which, in Bell’s account, amounts to the evaluative claim. This transition can be clearly observed in the following passages:

> [O]ur emotional responses often seem to take in the person as a whole—we love a person, not numbers 5, 32, and 91 on a list of local traits […] Emotions in the neighborhood of disdain, contempt, and disgust […] are associated to global assessments of character, casting aspersion on the person taken as a whole.
>
> (Doris 2002, 167)

> What is distinctive about globalist attitudes such as contempt, shame, and disgust is that there is a sense in which these attitudes resist “compartmentalisation”. They take as their intentional object *whole persons*. Globalist attitudes have a permeating quality.
>
> (Bell 2011, 457)

These quotes suggest that agential emotions take *persons* as intentional objects and that, *therefore*, they yield global evaluations of the persons towards whom they are directed. The rationale behind this conclusion seems to be that there are two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive options regarding the intentionality of agential emotions: either (a) agential emotions take persons as intentional objects and, therefore, they provide global evaluations of the persons towards whom they are directed, or (b) agential emotions take psychological traits as intentional objects and, therefore, they yield local evaluations of specific traits. In light of what precedes, many accept the first disjunct and reject the second option.

Although we concur with these philosophers concerning the claim that agential emotions are intentionally directed towards persons rather than towards character traits, the disjunction between (a) and (b) seems to amount to a false dichotomy. Another possibility is that agential emotions are intentionally directed towards persons and that they portray them as admirable or contemptible *in specific respects.* We hardly ever admire or contemn people in generic ways, we most often admire them as, say, tennis players, as academics, as cooks, or as friends, but we can also admire them for their kindness or for their insightfulness.[10] This point has been made on different grounds for admiration (Archer and Matheson 2021, 21–23), contempt (Abramson 2010, 198), pride (Fischer 2012, 217), and shame (Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni 2012, 105). There is indeed no contradiction in claiming that we do admire *persons*, but that our admiration will portray them as admirable in some specific respect, for instance with respect to their kindness, their generosity, or their skills in playing tennis. More generally, we need to distinguish between an emotion's intentional object and the scope of the evaluation delivered by that emotion. Admiration may necessarily be intentionally directed towards persons, but this does not imply – as these examples suggest –

that admiration necessarily delivers a global, all things considered evaluation of their character. This is the first blind spot in Bell's view.

This claim can be buttressed by the same thought which led Bell to argue against Doris' view. Recall that Bell's objection against Doris is that, if agential emotions really presented persons as admirable or contemptible in all respects, then as soon as we learn that some person we admire has some negative trait (or a person we contemn has some positive trait) we ought to revise our admiration (or our contempt). Given the implausibility of this conclusion, Bell urges us to reject the claim that agential emotions evaluate persons as admirable, contemptible etc. in all respects. The same argument can be deployed, *mutatis mutandis*, against Bell's claim that agential emotions necessarily deliver all things considered agential evaluations. For instance, suppose that Archie admires Bertie as a tennis player. In this case, Bell would say that Archie's admiration delivers a global evaluation in which Bertie's tennis skills are evaluatively prioritised. However, it seems that if Archie were to learn that Bertie is not all things considered admirable – suppose that Bertie's tennis skills, even if justifiedly prioritised by Archie's admiration, are outweighed by his other traits – Archie would also not be rationally urged to revise his admiration. After all, Archie admires Bertie *as a tennis player*, therefore considerations unrelated to this quality of Bertie's – for instance his other traits, skills, or all things considered admirability – should not interfere with the rational assessment of Archie's admiration. Therefore, agential evaluations do not seem to deliver all things considered evaluations in the way Bell suggests.

Some may respond, following Kauppinen (2019, 25), that our admiration usually recedes when we learn that a person we admire in a non-moral respect possesses some serious moral flaw, and that this counts against the point made above and in favour of the claim that admiration delivers global evaluations. Although Kauppinen is right in claiming that admiration usually recedes in these cases, this phenomenon is not due to the purported globality of this emotion, but to other kinds of considerations. Notice first of all that, as Kauppinen (2019, 27) concedes, finding out that someone we admire as a tennis player has a number of non-moral, non-noxious flaws usually does not affect and should not affect the admiration we feel for them. His observation therefore seems to apply only to cases involving negative moral considerations. This suggests that the explanation of this phenomenon is not to be found in the globality of admiration, but in something specific to morality.

At least two explanations of this specificity can be sketched. Firstly, admiration often recedes because moral flaws strike us as much more significant than forms of non-moral excellence and, in light of these considerations, our non-moral admiration often conflicts with and is preempted by our contempt for a person in light of their moral failings. Secondly, admiration often recedes in these cases not because we think it unfitting with respect to the admired person's non-moral excellence, but because we are moved by important moral reasons against feeling admiration – reasons which do not bear on the fittingness of admiration as such and that therefore do not inform us of its globality (D'Arms and Jacobson 2000a).[11] The case raised by Kauppinen therefore does not establish that admiration delivers global evaluations. On the contrary, as argued by Archer and Matheson (2019, 249; 2021, 23), claiming that admiration always delivers global evaluations prevents us from capturing the conflicts described above, since the moral and non-moral qualities of a person would converge in a single, global evaluation. The possibility of these conflicts precisely presupposes that admiration can be felt towards persons in specific respects.[12]

Let us now turn to the normative claim, namely that agential emotions are fitting if and only if the person towards whom they are directed is admirable, contemptible and so forth *all things considered*. There are two independent reasons to reject this claim. Firstly, this claim draws support from the truth of the evaluative claim. The requirement that one be all things considered admirable in order for admiration to be fitting is directly derived from the assumption that admiration presents persons as being admirable all things considered. However, if what precedes is true, then the evaluative claim is false and, consequently, the normative claim loses its support. Secondly, even if Bell's second claim were unaffected by what precedes, it would still yield counterintuitive fittingness verdicts. Suppose that Archie admires Bertie as a tennis player and that, despite his exceptional tennis skills, Bertie happens not to be admirable all things considered – in fact, except for his tennis skills, he is quite average. Suppose now that tennis does not have any particular importance for either of our two fellows and that, therefore, Bertie's tennis skills cannot justifiedly be thought to weigh more than his other traits in the assessment of his overall admirability for Archie.[13] According to Bell's formulation of the fittingness conditions of agential emotions, Archie's admiration is unfitting since Bertie is not all things considered admirable for Archie. This conclusion is counterintuitive. It seems perfectly fitting for Archie to admire Bertie precisely because Archie admires Bertie *as a tennis player* and Bertie is admirable *in this respect*, even though he is not admirable all things considered (Thomson 2008, 116). This is the second blind spot in Bell's view.

At this point, some may argue that our criticisms are misguided. Firstly, some may argue that talking of admiration as evaluating persons in specific respects is, precisely, simply a way of talking that does not reflect any kind of psychological reality. Therefore, the case for the globality of these attitudes would remain unscathed. Secondly, some may worry that thinking of agential emotions in this way will lead us back to the claim that we admire traits or actions, and precisely not persons. In what follows, we will show that these worries are unfounded. The claims made above are in fact supported by important considerations concerning the intentionality of the emotions that have been neglected in the literature on the fittingness of agential emotions. We will not only show that there is a well-established psychological reality behind the claim that we admire persons in specific respects, but also that we can retain the sense in which these attitudes are intentionally directed towards persons, and not towards their character traits or their actions.

5. Replying to the fittingness objection

Research on the intentional structure of the emotions has led to an important distinction between two components of their intentionality: an emotion's intentional object and an emotion's focal properties. An emotion's intentional object is (i) the object that the emotion presents as the bearer of a specific evaluative property and (ii) the object towards which the emotion disposes us to act (Lyons 1980; Gordon 1987). An emotion's focal properties are the properties of the intentional object (i) onto which an emotion focalises the subject's attention and (ii) which the emotion portrays as making the intentional object valuable or disvaluable in specific ways (De Sousa 1987; cf. Elgin 2008). For example, in fearing some cat, Archie's attention may be brought on its feral look (because he believes that feral cats transmit disease) and Bertie's attention may be brought on its black fur (because he is very superstitious). These instances of fear are importantly alike in one respect, but dissimilar in another: they share the same intentional object, but they do not share the same focal properties.

The intentional object of these episodes of fear is, of course, the cat. It is the cat that is portrayed as dangerous (not its feral look, nor its black fur) and it is the cat that our fellows are motivated to flee (not its feral look, nor its black fur). These episodes of fear nevertheless differ with respect to their focal properties: fear directs our fellows' attention onto different features of the same cat. This shaping of attention in turn helps us make sense of the intuition that Archie and Bertie fear the cat in different ways: as a carrier of disease and as a harbinger of bad luck.[14] The claim that the intentional object of our fellows' episodes of fear is the cat, then, does not imply that their fear in each case portrays the cat as dangerous in the same way – let alone that it portrays the cat as dangerous in all respects or all things considered. It is the nature of an emotion's focal properties and the way in which these are construed that determine the scope of the evaluation delivered by that emotion, not the nature and scope of an emotion's intentional object.

This thought is crucial because it allows us to articulate more clearly why it is a mistake to seamlessly transition from the claim that agential emotions are intentionally directed towards persons to the claim that they evaluate persons in a global or totalising fashion. We can admit that persons – and not their psychological traits – are the *intentional objects* of agential emotions: admiration portrays *persons* as admirable and it is *persons* that admiration poises us to emulate. This claim, however, does not commit us to the claim that agential emotions deliver *in all respects* or *all things considered* evaluations of their intentional objects. In order to claim that admiration necessarily delivers global evaluations of those we admire, it is not sufficient to claim that persons – and not their psychological traits – are the intentional object of admiration. More demandingly, one must claim that admiration always focalises one's attention on the intentional object as a whole and never on specific aspects such as one's kindness, one's generosity, or one's tennis skills.

This seems too strong. In admiring Bertie, Archie's attention will be directed onto Bertie's tennis skills as manifested in his way of delivering powerful shots and his way of predicting his opponent's moves. It is indeed particularly plausible to claim that Archie admires Bertie as a tennis player given the tennis-related properties that the former's episode of admiration makes salient through the focalisation of attention. This point generalises quite neatly. Agential emotions are often focalised on specific traits or skills rather than on persons as a whole. In contemning one's neighbour, one's attention might be drawn to their callousness; in feeling ashamed of oneself as a painter, one's attention will be drawn to one's poor artistic abilities; in feeling proud of oneself, one's attention might be drawn to one's reliability. Most of the time, we are not admiring of others in generic ways; we are often fully aware, upon reflection, of the specific properties that our admiration singles out in the admired person, and these are the respects in which that person is portrayed as admirable. This nuance in the evaluations delivered by agential emotions is something that Doris and Bell seem to have overlooked.

Some, like Mason (2003, 247), may insist that this is not sufficient to claim that these emotions deliver local evaluations. Witnessing the manifestation of a person's kindness might elicit admiration, but the evaluation delivered by this emotion will be global and, precisely, not limited to a single aspect of the admired person's character such as their kindness. This is a possible option, but phenomenological considerations cast doubt on this view. It is not only in the cognitions that precede an emotion that we are sensitive to certain traits, it is also in the very experience of admiration or contempt that specific traits are made salient. In admiring someone for their kindness, our attention will be focalised on this character trait as manifested in their actions, and not on other aspects of that person.[15] As soon as we dispel the conflation between an emotion's intentional object and the scope of its evaluation, it is unclear in what sense agential emotions necessarily deliver global evaluations of the person towards whom they are directed.

Some, like Kauppinen (2019, 26), may argue that this much may well be true, but that this view commits us to the implausible assumption that there are many different types of admiring attitudes: moral admiration, aesthetic admiration, admiration-for-kindness, admiration-for-generosity, admiration-for-one's-tennis-skills and so forth. Kauppinen is right in claiming that we do not have as many distinct psychological attitudes of admiration as the respects in which people can be admirable. However, it would be wrong to think that claiming that we can admire persons in specific respects commits us to the claim that there are indefinitely many different admiring attitudes. The view defended here is that there is one kind of admiration which may target different intentional objects and which can make different aspects of these intentional objects salient through the focalisation of attention. This view has the advantage of allowing for the idea that we can admire people in different respects, and yet avoid the admittedly implausible conclusion that there are hundreds of different kinds of admiration.

The arguments provided thus far should be sufficient to see that our way of responding to Fittingness Objection consists in rejecting P1. This approach has notoriously been deemed unviable by both detractors and defenders of agential emotions on the grounds that its rejection seems to imply that agential emotions are directed towards traits, a claim which strikes most philosophers as implausible. Nevertheless, P1 can plausibly be denied exactly because we reject the invalid transition, implicit in this premise, from the claim that agential emotions are intentionally directed towards persons to the claim that agential emotions necessarily deliver global evaluations. As soon as the validity of this transition is denied, the claim that agential emotions necessarily deliver global evaluations appears misguided. This view has the advantage of denying P1 in a way that is psychologically plausible as it retains the important sense in which these emotions are intentionally directed towards persons, while also accounting for the equally important sense in which these emotions often deliver local rather than global evaluations of the persons towards whom they are directed. If this is correct, then Fittingness Objection can be blocked while avoiding the first blind spot in Bell's view.

Let us now turn to Fittingness Objection's second premise. According to P2, given that agential emotions evaluate persons globally, a person must be globally admirable, contemptible etc. in order for admiration, contempt etc. to be fitting. As suggested above, however, this premise entirely loses support if P1 is denied. If admiration does not necessarily portray persons as globally admirable, it is not necessary for the intentional object of admiration to be globally admirable in order for admiration to be fitting, it is sufficient that the admired person be admirable in the local respect in which admiration portrays them to be (cf. McHugh and Way 2016, 603). For example, given that Archie admires Bertie as a tennis player, the necessary and sufficient condition for Archie's admiration for Bertie to be fitting is for Bertie to be an admirable tennis player, and not necessarily to be an admirable person – be it in all respects or all things considered. This is the result we had been looking for and it extends to contempt, pride, and shame in a way that avoids the second blind spot in Bell's solution, namely that Archie's admiration is unfitting since Bertie is, all things considered, not a particularly admirable person. If this is correct, there seems to be no reason to doubt that we often fittingly admire or contemn others insofar as we do so with respect to specific traits or skills of theirs.

The content of this proposal can be further clarified by contrasting it with Kauppinen's (2019) view. According to Kauppinen, admiration delivers global evaluations and to claim that we can admire persons in specific respects commits us to the existence of a multitude of admiring attitudes. In order to block Fittingness Objection, instead of distinguishing various kinds of admiration, Kauppinen distinguishes various kinds of fittingness relations: moral fittingness, athletic fittingness, artistic fittingness and so forth. For instance, it may be athletically fitting for Archie to admire Bertie, but morally unfitting for him to do so. This account has the advantage of retaining the idea that it is fitting in some respect for Archie to admire Bertie, but unfitting in another. The problem with this take is that, even though it does not commit us to the existence of various kinds of admiration, it commits us to the existence of various kinds of fittingness relations. Furthermore, these fittingness relations would have to be individuated in extremely fine-grained ways in order for the proposal to yield the right results. Supposing that admiration is global in scope and that Archie is a great tennis player but a poor rugby player, it is tennis-wise fitting and rugby-wise unfitting for Bertie to admire Archie. So, supposing that admiration's scope is always global, admiration will *always* be fitting in some respect and unfitting in another because there will *always* be respects in which one is admirable and others in which one is not. Therefore, it is unclear that Kauppinen's view can avoid the conclusion that agential emotions are always, in some way, unfitting and misleading.

Our view has the means to avoid these problems. Firstly, we can claim, as previously argued, that admiration is directed towards persons and that it can nonetheless deliver local evaluations restricted to specific traits or skills of theirs. This can be done without having to allow for a multitude of admiring attitudes. Admiration for Archie as an academic is not a distinct kind of attitude from admiration for Bertie as a tennis player: it is the same attitude in which different aspects of the intentional object are made salient. Secondly, we can maintain that there is only one fittingness relation. In claiming that admiration for Archie as a tennis player is fitting, we are saying that this attitude and the fine-grained evaluation it delivers are appropriate to the extent that Archie has the qualities of an excellent tennis player. According to our view, then, there is neither a myriad of admiring attitudes nor a myriad of fittingness relations, only a psychologically plausible specification of the content of admiration which entails a refinement of its fittingness conditions and of the fittingness conditions of other agential emotions. This should be sufficient to clarify the content of our view.

6. Conclusion

Two conclusions can be drawn from this discussion. The first is that Fittingness Objection provides no reason to think that agential emotions are systematically unfitting and hence largely undeserved, as Doris worries.[16] Crucially, our account can establish this conclusion without incurring in the two blind spots that beset Bell's theory. The second is that our account can suggest a response to the challenge raised by Kauppinen's remarks about the globality of admiration's action tendencies. The worry was that, being global in scope, the action tendencies of admiration and of other agential emotions will be pervasive and, therefore, potentially misleading. For instance, admiration could poise us to emulate the admired person in many respects and not only in those respects in which they excel. Therefore, even if fitting by Bell's or Kauppinen's standards, admiration could still lead us to emulate those we fittingly admire in regards in which they ought not to be emulated.

As argued above, however, we most often do not simply admire others in generic ways: we admire them in specific respects. It is plausible, then, to think that an emotion's focal properties will have an important imprint on that emotion's action tendencies. For example, admiration will poise us to emulate those we admire in those same regards on which our admiration focalises: admiration may poise Archie to behave like Bertie on the tennis court, to move like he moves, play like he plays, and – why not – buy his same tennis racket, because these are the things that are made salient by his admiration (cf. Zagzebski 2017, 33). It is dubious, however, that admiration will poise Archie to emulate Bertie in regards on which his admiration does not focalise. This suggestion would require additional argumentation for which space is lacking, but we can make the following suggestion: admiration, when fitting, can lead to positive agential development through focussed action tendencies. Advancement on this question will nevertheless require further research on the intentionality and motivational import of agential emotions – at least if we are to understand how these attitudes can be valuable vehicles of agential development.

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Endnotes

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[1] The requirement for fittingness is necessary to exclude cases in which we admire people who are not admirable, for instance because they are despicable or because they are not truly skilled or virtuous. In the first case, admiration is likely to bring about *negative* agential development since it will push us to acquire disvaluable traits. In the second case, admiration could bring about positive agential development, but this development will be lucky rather than well-guided since those we admire are not reliable exemplars. Meeting the fittingness requirement is thus necessary for these emotions to be valuable vehicles of agential development. We leave it open whether meeting this requirement is also a sufficient condition for the truth of this claim since the answer to this question does not affect the claims made in this article.

[2] Notice that there are ways of arguing in favour of the globality of these attitudes that do not proceed from the problematic assumption common to Doris' and Bell's accounts. De Caro, Vaccarezza, and Niccoli (2018), for instance, argue in favour of the globality of moral admiration and of judgments of moral exemplarity by proceeding from a version of the principle of interpretative charity. Given the aim and scope of this article, this argument will not be discussed. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this view.

[3] Agential evaluations may thus involve the attribution of a virtue or vice, e.g., courage and cowardice, which are usually considered *character traits*, but also the attribution of a skill or incompetence, e.g., diplomacy or clumsiness, which are not traits but *abilities* and *inabilities*. Unless noted, our discussion will apply to both.

[4] The argument does not challenge agential evaluations that involve the attribution of a skill or incompetence since their existence is not denied by situationists. This point is implied in the schematised argument for a lighter presentation.

[5] The details of these experiments are carefully exposed in Doris (2002) and summarised in Kamtekar (2004). The factors at stake are, for instance, being in a good mood, being in a rush, or the influence of authority.

[6] There could be moral or prudential reasons to admire or contemn someone, but these are not reasons that count in favour of admiring or contemning them in virtue of their actually being virtuous or vicious and, thereby, deserving of admiration or contempt for their virtues or vices (D'Arms and Jacobson 2000a).

[7] The denomination 'Fittingness Objection' is taken from Bell (2011, 454).

[8] See for instance Mason (2003), Bell (2011, 2013) and Kauppinen (2017, 2019). See Archer and Matheson (2021) for the claim that admiration can also be directed towards actions, traits, groups, and objects.

[9] We can of course say that we contemn arrogance. This kind of claim nevertheless seems to be a metonymic way of referring to our disposition to contemn arrogant people (Kauppinen 2019, 24).

[10] This idea will certainly be reminiscent, to many, of the thought already expressed by Geach (1956) and Thomson (2008) according to which, when we deem something good (or useful, or admirable), we always deem it good *in a way*: one may be an admirable tennis player but not an admirable academic.

[11] See Archer and Matheson (2019) for a discussion of the moral considerations in question.

[12] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to develop this point in more detail.

[13] This second supposition excludes cases of justified evaluative prioritisation mentioned above. Even if Archie's admiration were to present Bertie as all things considered admirable by portraying his tennis skills as more important than other aspects of his person in his overall assessment, this prioritisation seems unjustified.

[14] Attention is modulated by the emotions based on the subject's innate and acquired sensibility to certain features. The fact that our fellows' attention is drawn onto different features is due to the different background beliefs, memories, and sensibilities which underlie their emotional reactions.

[15] Feeling admiration for a person with respect to their kindness may have us interact with them in a way that may reveal other aspects of that same person which will also elicit admiration. In this kind of case, however, there are two distinct episodes of admiration focalising on different properties. This is what might give us the impression that agential emotions deliver global evaluations (cf. Archer and Matheson 2021, 22).

[16] Notice that there are other worries about these attitudes, for example the swiftness with which we come to admire or contemn others (cf. Doris 2002, 168). See Bell (2011, 2013) for a discussion.

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