

CONTEMPT'S EVALUATIVE PRESENTATION AND CONNECTION TO ACCOUNTABILITY

Zac Cogley
Northern Michigan University
zcogley@nmu.edu

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In this chapter, I defend a novel account of contempt's evaluative presentation by synthesizing relevant psychological work (Rozin et al. 1999; Fischer and Roseman 2007; Fischer 2011; Hutcherson and Gross 2011) with philosophical insights (Mason 2003; Bell 2005; Abramson 2009; Bell 2013). I then show how a concern about contempt's status as an emotion involved in holding people accountable can be helpfully addressed. Finally, I gesture at an account of why, when we feel contemptuous toward people, our accountability responses involve withdrawal and exclusion rather than approach and confrontation.

1. *Background Theory of Emotions*

Before I say more about contempt, I want to lay out my general theoretical approach to emotions. I view emotions as having multiple functions, including, at least *evaluation, communication, and motivation* (Cogley 2014). Emotions evaluate, or appraise, our environment in various ways (Parkinson 1997). For example, fear appraises our situation as dangerous; resentment appraises someone else's conduct as wrong. Emotions also communicate to others—via characteristic facial expressions (Ekman 1999), speech patterns (Scherer 1986; Scherer et al. 1991), and bodily movements (Wallbott 1998)—that we have appraised our environment (and sometimes persons) in relevant ways and that we are therefore more likely to take certain kinds of actions than others. Resentment's characteristic communication might be a request that another see himself as a wrongdoer (Macnamara 2013b), a demand that the target acknowledge fault (Darwall 2006), or both. Finally, emotions have motivational effects. For example, resentment characteristically motivates people to confront or approach the target of their emotion to try to change their situation (Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones 2007; Baumeister and Bushman 2007).¹

On my view, emotions are functional psychological processes designed to bring us from an initial evaluation of our environment to then communicating that evaluation to others and motivating characteristic kinds of actions.² Emotions thus have a mind-to-world direction of fit: they are representations/evaluations of the world as being a certain way/being good or bad in various respects. They also have world-to-mind direction of fit: they represent/evaluate how the world should be. (The communicative function may play a

¹ Aggression and attack are often presented as the typical motivational profile of anger. But psychological research suggests that while some individuals certainly do aggress or attack because of anger these are not universal motivational tendencies. For discussion, see (Averill 1982; Steffgen and Pfetsch 2007; Cogley 2014).

² Andrea Scarantino (2014) has recently defended a 'Motivational Theory' of emotion that has significant overlap with my view. Scarantino does not discuss communicative functions, though he discusses both evaluational and motivational ones.

role in both.) In Millikan's (2004) terminology, they are *pushmi-pullyu* representations, representing both facts and goals at the same time. Put another way, the function of emotion is to take us from sets of discrete evaluative inputs to communicative and motivational tendencies that serve important goals related to the relevant inputs.³ Below, I will argue that contempt's function is to take us from an evaluation of a person as failing at a socially salient role to communicating to her that she has been evaluated in that way and motivating us to withdraw from her or ostracize her.

2. *Contempt is not Disgust, Resentment, or Hatred*

Let me introduce one more set of distinctions before turning directly to focus on contempt. Contempt is a discrete emotion from disgust and resentment.⁴ Disgust arguably has two types (Kelly 2011). One functions to take us from evaluations of our environment as being physically contaminating to an action tendency of oral ejection. The other takes us from evaluations of persons/situations as being impure to an action tendency of social rejection. Resentment, as noted above, takes us from evaluations of wrongness to the action tendency of confrontation. I view hatred, by contrast, as a kind of resentment at a person where the relevant action tendencies are to destroy or eliminate her.⁵ Contempt serves a different function than these other emotions.

3. *Paradigm Cases*

Consider three paradigm cases. In the first, my father plays bridge with some of the regulars at his local senior center. One of the players is a novice—a “tyro,” as he put it—who thinks she's an excellent player. When players are betting on how many tricks they will take, she consistently bids up the contract higher than she and her partner have any chance of going. For my father, this completely ruins the game. There's no suspense or strategy in many of the rounds she plays. He attempts to sit in foursomes where she won't be included, but players are typically rotated throughout the day so he can't consistently avoid her. When he relayed this to me, his face showed clear disdain.

Michelle Mason (2003) adapts a situation from the movie *Le Mépris* to provide another archetype of contempt. Paul's wife, Camille, comes to have contempt for him because of his treatment of her. Paul has been approached by a film producer, Prokosh, to write a screenplay. It becomes clear that Prokosh's offer is a thinly veiled attempt to seduce Camille. Shockingly, Paul is an active facilitator of Prokosh's aims: he encourages Camille against her wishes to ride alone with Prokosh in his 2-seat sports car to Prokosh's chalet while Paul rides separately in a cab; he delays his arrival long enough that the film suggests a

³ “Human smiles and frowns that are not yet overlaid with conscious intentions are simple [pushmi-pullyu's], telling that something potentially rewarding has just been done and to keep doing it or do it again, or telling that something potentially damaging has just been done and to stop doing it or not do it again” (Millikan 2004, 157–58). I claim that emotions themselves, not just their common facial signs, have this function.

⁴ Jesse Prinz suggests that contempt may be a blend of disgust and anger (2004). But he additionally holds that a blended emotion can come to represent something distinct from either of the basic emotions from which it is constructed. So in this sense, contempt may be importantly distinct from the primitives (Prinz 2004, 146–47), meaning it can be regarded as a discrete emotion.

⁵ See (Bell 2013, 51–58) for a more careful defense of these claims.

seduction. Camille then becomes distant from Paul: she shuns his entreaties and generally withdraws from him, refusing to explain herself even when pressed.⁶

Finally, Macalester Bell provides this example: in 2011, political revolution had already come to Tunisia and Egyptian protesters were demanding the same for their country, including free and fair elections and the resignation of the President, Hosni Mubarak. During the height of the protests, it was announced that Mubarak would address the nation. Rumors suggested that in the speech he would step down, but instead he avowed his intent to continue to rule, declaring that Egypt “will remain a country dear to my heart. It will not part with me and I will not part with it until my passing.”⁷ In response, many in the crowd waved their shoes in the air, a clear gesture of contempt in many parts of the world.

4. *Characteristic Evaluation*

Contempt, like all emotions, has a characteristic *evaluative presentation*, a way in which the emotion presents the world.⁸ Contempt’s evaluative presentation is of a person who has failed in a socially salient role. In the above examples, my father evaluates the tyro as an unacceptable *bridge player*. A minimally acceptable bridge player calibrates her betting with her abilities. Camille construes Paul as not much of a *husband*. A decent husband doesn’t prostitute sexual favors from his wife to advance his career. The Egyptian citizens think Mubarak is no *President*. A truly democratic leader is at least somewhat responsive to the will of the people.

Another way to express the idea that contempt focuses on social role violations or failures is to appeal to the idea of a role *baseline*: the standards defining when one counts as a minimally acceptable bridge player, husband, president, and so on.⁹ These social roles are all defined by normative standards of some sort. To actually play bridge, one must follow a certain amount of the rules of the game, including implicit ones like how to bet. To be someone’s husband in a more than legal sense requires, in many people’s normative conception, that you must not be indifferent to whether your wife has sex with other people. And to be a president—the head of a republican state—means that you must listen to the demands of the populace. Someone with the title “President” who never cares about the views of the citizens holds that office in name, only. He has fallen below the role baseline.

5. *Characteristic Motivations and Communications*

⁶ Neither Mason nor myself are attempting to offer a full, nuanced picture of the arc of the film. I mean to portray Paul as willingly prostituting his wife for financial/artistic gain.

⁷ I take the discussion of Mubarak and the quotation from (Bell 2013, 7–8).

⁸ Evaluative presentations can be accurate or inaccurate—if a snake is venomous, for example, fear is accurate. If it’s just a rubber toy, fear is not. They can also be supported by good reasons, or not. When you become resentful at perceived wrongdoing based on scanty evidence, your resentment is not well-grounded.

⁹ I draw the idea of the baseline from Bell’s discussion of the concept, which is ultimately due to (Ben-Ze’ev 2001). I depart somewhat from Bell’s conception, however, which ties the idea to the contemnor’s psychological framework in the sense that “one’s personal baseline demarcates who one would not stoop to be” (Bell 2013, 39 n. 46). I think, instead, that you can feel contempt toward someone based on their failure to live up to a minimal standard for a normatively defined social role that you will never consider occupying. I discuss this point further, below.

The examples above involve people evaluating others and in response trying not to associate with them and rejecting their affiliative appeals. My father tries to avoid the novice bridge player, Camille spurns Paul's supplications, and the protestors scorn Mubarak's intention to remain in power. Psychological evidence suggests these are typical contempt responses. Frijda (1986) holds that contempt is an attitude of indifference toward, or an active rejection of, someone or something. Roseman et al. found that contemptuous people, "felt like rejecting and not associating with someone, and wanted to be far away from and unlike someone" (1994, 212). Famously, contempt is one of the best predictors of divorce (Gottman 1998; Gottman and Levenson 2002). Fischer and Roseman (2007) adduce evidence that, in comparison to anger, someone feeling contempt is more likely to try to socially exclude the target. As they put it, "the social function of contempt is to move this person away from oneself and to ban him or her from one's social environment" (2007, 112). Philosophers concur with the psychological evidence, holding that contempt motivates avoidance and withdrawal (Mason 2003; Bell 2005; Abramson 2009; Bell 2013).

While it is thought that contempt has a characteristic facial expression (Ekman and Friesen 1986; Matsumoto and Ekman 2004)—the raising of the corner of one lip, or 'sneering'—experimental subjects are not always able to easily categorize this display as contempt (Haidt and Keltner 1999). One reason for this may be that 'contempt,' unlike for example 'anger,' is not used nearly as often in common, current use. A search in Google Books finds that for books published in 2000, 'anger' is used about three times as often as 'contempt' ("Google Ngram Viewer" 2016).¹⁰ Interestingly, however, non-linguistic emotional vocalizations of contempt are better apprehended than either facial or speech vocalizations (Hawk et al. 2009).

6. *Affinities with Other Accounts*

My idea that contempt is concerned with social role norm violations is indebted to the prior work of several parties. Paul Rozin, Laura Lowery, Sumio Imada, and Jonathan Haidt conducted experiments that show contempt more commonly elicited than anger and disgust by violations of communal codes: an employee directly criticizes her boss, a cleaner sits in the chair of the company president, a company executive refuses to sit next to a laborer on a train (1999). Rozin et al note that contempt, anger, and disgust all involve disapproval (Izard 1977), but that the kind of disapproval characteristic of each emotion is distinct. Drawing on the work of (Shweder et al. 1997) on different moral codes, they argue that anger is concerned with wrongs like rights violations or infringements of someone's freedom, disgust with violations of purity and divinity norms, and contempt with community and hierarchy violations. On their model, when you consider whether an act is contemptible, "you think about things like duty, role-obligation, respect for authority, loyalty, group honor, interdependence, and the preservation of the community" (Rozin et al. 1999, 575–76). I claim that the idea of a normatively defined social role links all of these disparate concepts together. You count as loyal/disloyal, appropriately respectful/rude to authority, or honorable/dishonorable in reference to a normatively defined social role that you are construed as occupying. Importantly, however, you are only seen as violating the relevant communal, hierarchal norms—and so viewed as contemptible—if your social role requires that you adhere to them in a particular context. For example, etiquette is a communal code that requires of hosts that they make others welcome in various ways. But you don't violate

¹⁰ In the period 1770-1910, contempt was the most common of the four emotion terms 'anger,' 'contempt,' 'disdain,' 'resentment.'

the norms of etiquette if you fail to offer a drink to your partner when she arrives home at the end of the day, though etiquette generally requires that for guests at parties. There are many communal codes that, depending on the social role you occupy and the context of the situation, you can contravene without being worthy of contempt.

My view also bears important similarities to Michelle Mason's (2003, 240–41) account. As I read Mason, she holds that contempt's implicit normative standards are for persons, generally. In my view, this is too wide of a focus for many instances of contempt. Mason takes Camille's contempt to be of Paul *as a person*. Instead, I take Camille to be contemptuous of Paul as a *husband*, or perhaps of him as a *man*.¹² My view also has significant affinities with Kate Abramson's understanding of contempt's presentation as of someone violating "legitimate moral demands made of her within the context of our interaction" (2009, 207), though I don't think the demands in question need to be moral in the sense that they serve to protect our well-being. A mixed-martial arts fighter, for example, might hold her opponent in contempt because her foe showed mercy. My account of contempt's evaluative presentation also bears significant debt to Macalester Bell's work (2005, 2013). On Bell's view, contempt presents its target as failing to meet some standard that the contemnor endorses (2013, 37). I am claiming that the relevant standards are provided by normatively defined social roles. Further, I endorse Bell's claim that contempt construes the target as falling below a relevant baseline.

There are two ways in which someone can fail to meet the baseline of a normatively defined social role. He can be incompetent in a way that indicates lack of ability to fulfill the requirements of the role, as in the novice bridge player.¹³ I construe the bridge player as lacking a basic grasp of bridge strategy and possessing unwarranted confidence in the cards she is dealt. That, coupled with her inability to see her losses as due to anything other than bad luck, means she doesn't understand her failures and lacks motivation to improve. Another way not to meet the baseline is to be intransigent about the role's requirements, or ill-willed about them, as in Mubarak's case. Mubarak likely feels contempt for the citizens of Egypt. He thinks they have dishonorably protested against him, the entitled ruler, and he must overawe them into proper submission.

Agneta Fischer and Roger Giner-Sorella's model of contempt supports the idea that in many cases, successive actions are required to demonstrate incompetence or intransigence in role performance (as in the examples above). But in some cases, at least, a one-off performance is construed as enough (forthcoming, 15–16). We can see this in the disdain shown by basketball fans toward players who shoot air-balls. For professional players, in particular, the minimum standard is to hit at least some part of the rim or backboard. Failing to do that even once in a game generates a contemptuous response from the crowd. The eye-rolling response of a teenager when her mother makes an ignorant social gaffe provides another example: "did you know Demi Lovato and the Jonas Brothers know each other?" The teen sees her mother as so hopelessly out of touch with the relevant subtleties there would be no point in even trying to explain the problem.

Whether the performance is one-off or a series, the relevant thing demonstrated is that the person's character makes her unfit for the role in question (for concurrence see

¹² Mason originally suggests that Camille might be contemptuous of Paul for not being enough of a man, but then seems to endorse the idea that contempt is concerned with normative standards for persons, in general.

¹³ For evidence that appraisals of incompetence are strongly predictive of contempt (rather than anger or disgust) see (Hutcherson and Gross 2011).

Mason 2003, 250). By *character*, I mean the psychological traits, capacities, and tendencies that reliably cause the target of contempt to act in various ways.¹⁴ In the bridge player example, my father evaluates the tyro as misunderstanding both the amount to bet and her own relative strength as a player. Her foolish inexperience is the target of his contempt. Camille's contempt of Paul construes him as uncaring for her as his spouse, given that he is willing to prostitute her in return for personal gain. Mubarak's prideful entitlement is what makes him an unsuitable holder of the presidency and thus worthy of contempt.

7. *Points of Contention*

Above, I canvassed significant similarities between my account of contempt's evaluative presentation and the work of others. Here I want to explore some areas of disagreement. First, Bell claims that contempt is what she terms a *globalist* emotion which takes whole persons as its object.¹⁵ One way to see the point is that while we do get angry with other persons, we get angry with them *for what they have done*. For Bell, we feel contempt not for just a few of the person's characteristics, but for *all of her*. I want to agree with Bell that contempt is about stable aspects of persons that make them unfit for the relevant social roles—their character traits.¹⁶ When the parent's single social blunder is enough to bring forth the teen's contempt, the contempt focuses on the fact that the parent's blunder shows—from the teen's perspective—serious social misunderstanding. But I don't find reason to think the teen's contempt construes the parent as falling below all relevant role-standards (see Abramson 2009, 199–200 for concurrence). Many teens seek their parents' guidance about academic manners while they never do the same about musical groups. At the moment we feel contempt for another person, we're not typically trotting out her contrasting virtues at the same time. But this shouldn't lead us to infer that contempt necessarily evaluates every aspect of the contemned person negatively. Here's another case to further press the point.

Imagine that in the course of your new faculty orientation you meet another faculty member also just starting at the university. She's at the same career point as you and very congenial; you immediately hit it off. You quickly develop a friendship and see each other socially. When it's getting close to your first-year review, it occurs to you both that you need peer teaching evaluations and so you each volunteer to sit in on the class of the other. Unfortunately, however, your friendly colleague's teaching is the worst you've ever seen. While your friend can talk sensibly one-to-one, it seems her ability to think and talk clearly dissolves when teaching. Every attempt at clarity is a more confusing mess of jargon and contrasting claims. It's clear from the students' reactions that this is the norm for the course. You can't help but feel contempt for your friend's teaching. This, of course, may cause problems in your relationship (just wait until you have to write the peer teaching letter!) but I

¹⁴ Even those like (Doris 2002) who hold that we lack character traits that predict behavior in many different circumstances allow that we possess local traits that reliably predict behavior in similar types of circumstance. Note also that these traits might or might not be changeable, or under the person's control. Contempt isn't concerned with whether failures of understanding, lacks of care, or hubris are mutable.

¹⁵ Mason thinks that contempt typically has this whole person-focus, but does not hold that it always must (2003, 246–47).

¹⁶ For related empirical discussion of how differing causal attributions—stable, general features of the target vs. unstable, specific features—lead to different emotions, see (Tracy and Robins 2004).

see no reason to assume that your contempt for your friend as a teacher construes the rest of her as bad. It's not that you never again want to see her socially. You just want to never again sit in her class.

Another point of contention between my account of contempt's evaluative presentation and Bell's concerns whether in feeling contempt the contemnor necessarily sees herself as superior to the person contemned, who is construed as inferior. Bell holds that contempt requires the comparison occur, while I don't.¹⁷ (I do allow that it can be involved.) Bell calls this contempt's *comparative* or *reflexive* element and notes that both David Hume (2007) and William Ian Miller (1998) agree. It seems to me, though, that Bell herself provides an example that disproves this claim. She considers an alcoholic who feels contempt for alcoholics, including himself. She says, "the contemnor may have contempt for himself *and* for others who fail to meet his personal baseline; such a person sees these others as his inferior equals" (2013, 43). What I think this example shows is that the alcoholic views himself and other alcoholics as following below the baseline for responsible alcohol consumption. But I don't see how he can at the same time view himself as superior to himself or, alternatively, view the others as inferior to himself and himself their equal—either of which seems required on Bell's account. Or, at least, I don't see why we need to attribute these unusual attitudes to the alcoholic in order to make sense of his contempt.

It might be thought that my account of contempt's evaluative presentation is too narrow in focusing on role norms. Many see contempt as simply occurring in response to a person's dishonesty, irrationality, or general disregard of some social group (Mason 2003; Abramson 2009; Bell 2013). At least on first look, these contempt responses don't appear connected to a role-violation. In reply, I point out that dishonesty, irrationality, and even disregard of some groups is thought admirable in some contexts and does not prompt contempt. The robber doesn't condemn the effective lies of his accomplice, I enjoy the intriguing irrationality of my unusual friend, and we at least sometimes applaud disdain directed toward those worthy of derision. What determines when a person's dishonestly, irrationality, or disregard cause an observer's contempt and when they don't? Whether the observer construes the person as occupying a norm-governed social role, I predict. Importantly, as alluded to by (Rozin et al. 1999), there are a wide variety of social roles that humans may occupy. Some roles and their norms are highly specific— "friend to my best friend" — while others are far more general — "productive member of society." My empirical hypothesis is that social roles and norms play a central role in determining when contempt is elicited and when it is not.

Finally, I want to highlight one final point of contention between my construal of contempt's evaluative presentation and some others. On my view, contempt construes a person as demonstrating failure in a social role relative to a normatively defined role baseline *because she has a flawed character*. Some commentators deny that contempt's evaluative presentation implies anything at all about the target's character. They take contempt's evaluative presentation to be simply that the other lacks relevant social status. As Bell puts it, "the object of contempt may simply lack the appropriate status in the judgement of the

¹⁷ Mason takes my side: "we best understand contempt as presenting its object [as] falling short of some legitimate interpersonal idea of the person, one the contemnor endorses if not one that she herself succeeds in meeting" (2003, 241). She continues, "we need not assume that a contemnor [...] looks down upon her target in virtue of herself being superior in the relevant respect; to do so would make self-contempt a conceptual impossibility" (Mason 2003, 241n.15).

contemptuous” (2005, 83). And further, “In some cases, simply having a certain quality will be enough to count as failing to meet the ideal in question” (Bell 2005, 92n.3). Even Kate Abramson, who appears generally unsympathetic to this aspect of Bell’s position, says that, “contempt *commonly* takes for its object those vices which cannot be understood apart from their tie to morally prohibited conduct, and is *often* understood as an appropriate attitude only insofar as there is such a tie” (Abramson 2009, 206, emphasis added). Abramson thus seems to allow that some forms of contempt do not presuppose any conceptual tie to a person’s morally prohibited conduct or flawed character.

I want to make several points in defending the claim that contempt’s evaluative presentation necessarily contains a characterological focus. First, many psychologists take contempt to typically be caused by events where the contemnor blames the other for what she did (Hutcherson and Gross 2011; Fischer and Giner-Sorolla forthcoming); some studies find that contempt is associated with even more blame than anger (Fischer and Roseman 2007). Of course, the psychological studies are probing the characteristic causes of contempt, not directly investigating its evaluative presentation. Still, if we assume that our moral theorizing about human emotions should be constrained by how humans actually respond to one another, these results suggest that contempt’s evaluative presentation includes something for which the person can legitimately be blamed, such as the person’s character. Second, cases of contempt where it might initially appear there is no characterological focus are better interpreted as possessing one. Bell notes that, “a racist may hold people of color in contempt, not because of anything the targets have done or anything he thinks they have done, but simply in virtue of their race” (2013, 38). I suggest that even in these cases contempt has a characterological focus. Psychologists have found that dehumanization—one of the core mechanisms in racism—is associated with either seeing members of another group as more like machines (unfeeling doers) or animals (unthinking feelers) than inter-group members (Haslam 2006; Wegner and Gray 2016 Ch. 5). In either case, the contemptuous view of another group is associated with different views of their character.

We can validate a characterological focus for contempt while at the same time recognizing that it makes sense to call the responses of the racist contemptuous by invoking the notion of what Agneta Fischer and Roger Giner-Sorella term a *sentiment*: an emotional response caused by a long-term stereotype of an individual or group, rather than to an immediate reaction to an event (N. H. Frijda 1993; Fischer and Giner-Sorolla forthcoming). Arguably, a sentiment is formed by consistent patterns of emotional response to a common object (or similar objects) with particular properties. For example, (Ufkes et al. 2012) find that a stereotype of a group as less competent leads to increased feelings of contempt and increased tendencies to avoid members of that group. The racist’s stereotype might be a hasty generalization from one member of a group that she sees as incompetent, which leads her to feel contemptuous of other group members who she then infers are similarly incompetent. She infers the presumed incompetent character of the group members from their surface properties.¹⁸ Of course, she may well have no relevant experiences with those in the relevant group and may infer the incompetent character of people of other races by observing the contemptuous responses of other racists. But part of what makes racist contempt inaccurate is that it presumes, incorrectly, the flawed character of those it targets.

¹⁸ By comparison, note that humans spontaneously infer mental states that lead to harmful acts even when we have no evidence about the mental state in question (Young and Tsoi 2013).

If I interpret Bell's view of contempt correctly, it is hard to make out the error in the contemptuous response some people of higher status have to those with lower social status. It is true that many targets of race-based contempt are contemned for a characteristic—their race—which *should* have no bearing on their social status (Bell 2013, 216). But sometimes people are contemned in ways that do relate to appropriate social status gradations. Consider a teaching assistant who correctly sees herself as having a higher social status than her undergraduates and therefore feels contempt toward them. Bell is surely right that if the TA attempts to exact deference from her students, she demonstrates a vice (2013, 109). But what if the TA doesn't demand reverence, instead confining her contempt to those lonely moments when she has to read student papers? If employment as a TA and her training in higher education are appropriate grounds of higher social status, then it would appear on Bell's account that the TA's contempt for her undergraduates is accurate.

I think we should reject this conclusion and should also reject that it is fitting for a TA to condemn her students. We can do both by noting that the proper role relationship between the TA and students is one that assumes that the students know and understand less than the TA. Thus, in this context, their lack of understanding isn't a character flaw, it is just what is expected of them. If they are doing what their role demands, they certainly haven't violated it. Thus, the TA's contempt is inaccurate.

8. *Moral Concerns about Contempt*

In this section, I want to briefly consider two common moral objections to contempt before responding at greater length to a third. The first worry about contempt is that it always misrepresents its target due to its globalism: it takes whole persons as its object (Doris 2002). I deny that contempt does so. People are rarely contemptible in every respect, nor does contempt claim otherwise.¹⁹ Another related concern is that contempt violates people's basic claim of respect against others (Kant 1797; Hill 2000) because it construes people as lacking dignity. Again, I deny that contempt plays this role. Contempt claims people are failing to adequately perform their role in a socially salient domain. This is, no doubt, an uncomfortable truth to realize, but it is not disrespectful when it is accurate.

One concern has not been addressed: whether feeling contempt for someone is a way of morally addressing them or holding them accountable. Consider, for example, a non-accountability response like fear. If your actions pose a danger to me and I become fearful, my fear evaluates your conduct as bad for me. But my fear doesn't thereby seek a response from you. If anything, my fear seeks that I respond by fleeing. By contrast, we hold one another accountable when we blame people via the emotions of anger, resentment, and indignation and also behave toward them in associated ways. Becoming angry at you because of your frightening actions would be a way of holding you accountable and demanding a response: that you feel guilty, apologize, and make amends (Cogley 2013a, 2013b; Macnamara 2013a; Darwall 2006; Hieronymi 2001). Typically, when we are angry at someone we approach them and confront them over what they've done, thereby holding them accountable for their conduct. Thus, part of the reason for understanding resentment as an accountability response relates to its typical motivational tendencies. By contrast, Brenden Dill and Stephen Darwall claim that,

¹⁹ Bell's commitment to globalism means she must defend the idea that globalist contempt can be accurate: (2013, 78–89, 2010, 2008).

When a noble looks down on a serf with contempt, he hardly aims to have the serf hold himself accountable for his contemptible state. The emotion that responds to contempt is not guilt, but shame, which, as we have noted, shows itself in very different ways than guilt does. (2014, 70)

Dill and Darwall's claim is buttressed by the characteristic motivational and communicative tendencies of contempt: avoidance and withdrawal. A theorist who wants to defend contempt as an emotion connected to accountability needs to show why contempt counts as a way of holding responsible and fear does not, though both emotions share some similar motivational tendencies.

Why does it matter whether contempt is a way of holding people accountable? Responses that hold people accountable engage with people's agency. Resentment has two motivational components (Dill and Darwall 2014, 45). One is a forward-looking commitment to holding others to the demand that they not do wrong. The other is a backward-looking commitment to holding people accountable via blame and punishment when they have already done something wrong. While neither of these responses is enjoyable for the target, both count as ways of respecting them as people who are responsible for their choices. By contrast, being afraid of a person's behavior doesn't involve issuing a demand or making a claim. The person is simply taken to be dangerous and therefore to be avoided. The person feeling fear is not seeking a response from the person feared. If we are to legitimate contempt's claim to be a moral response that respects others, we need to show how it is a way of addressing people or holding them accountable.

One potential line of response is broached by Bell, who notes that it is possible to give contempt uptake, that is, to receive the message contained in contempt. Feeling guilty gives uptake to resentment because guilt's message, "I've done wrong," acknowledges the message contained in resentment: "You've done wrong." Bell points out that if someone is the target of contempt and believes the contempt is accurate, he will respond with shame (Bell 2013, 187). But this isn't enough to fully address Dill and Darwall's concern. The fact that there is a matched response doesn't show that the response is an accountability response. If I fear you, you may be appropriately horrified that I've seen you as dangerous. Or if you're disgusted by me, I might respond with fitting embarrassment. Bell notes that feeling disgusted shouldn't be construed as seeking a response, as any response from a thing evaluated as disgusting would be unwelcome (Bell 2013, 186). So not just any response will do—an accountability response has to be a response by the target that is, in some sense, sought by the person feeling contempt.

Kate Abramson gives an alternative reply to this concern. On her view, some forms of contempt are 'moralized' in the sense that the contempt is conceptually tied to characterological traits, like dishonesty, that generate morally improper conduct. Contempt that is moralized in this way then represents the person as to be avoided in a particular area of social interaction. This means that the person feeling contemptuous must thereby adopt the standpoint of someone who *could* have had those social interactions (Abramson 2009, 208). Again, this doesn't fully address Dill and Darwall's concern. The fact that someone's contempt for a dishonest person requires that the contemnor think of the other as a *potential* friend or authority figure doesn't show how the contemnor actually takes herself to have any *actual* relationship with the person contemned. Further, it doesn't show how the person is then rejected by the contemnor's refusal to engage the target in the first place.

To begin my own response to the concern raised by Dill and Darwall, consider a professor from another department you hold in contempt. You've never even been introduced; your contempt stems from reports from students and other faculty about his

behavior. You do see him at Academic Senate occasionally, however, and there you avoid him, refuse to meet his eyes, and generally stay disengaged. How does your refusal to engage with him address him? Answering this requires noting a background assumption of human sociality that applies to many of our interactions with each other. Humans are profoundly social creatures and our ‘default’ setting, as it were, appears to be to engage with others rather than disengage. Not only do we often acknowledge strangers on the street, but soldiers otherwise engaged in battle will move toward fraternization in some contexts (Ashworth 2000). Of course, there are other contexts, like the busy streets of Manhattan, where the background sociality assumption isn’t in place. But when it is in place, failure to engage sends a message to the contemned person that they aren’t worthy of social engagement. And someone is thought not be worthy of social engagement just in case they are failing at a socially salient role.

There’s a notable connection here to Christopher Bennett’s views on the nature of blame. Bennett imagines a man named Bryson who arrives at work one day and finds that none of his colleagues will look at him or otherwise engage with him (2002). Bryson calls out a greeting; no one responds. He settles into his seat at work, flummoxed by their continued silence. Slowly he realizes that they must know about his ongoing affair. He’s been cheating on his long-term partner and the woman with whom he’s trysting knows some of his office-mates. Bennett’s discussion revolves around the way that Bryson is alienated from his colleagues by his behavior and how their avoidant response is a common way of expressing blame. What interests me about the example is that it is immediately intelligible as *blame* and, while Bennett presents the colleagues as being *angry* with Bryson, they are at least as readily interpreted as *contemptuous* of him because they explicitly don’t follow the basic sociality assumption in their interactions with Bryson.

Finally, let’s return to the noble and serf in Dill and Darwall’s example. One way of interpreting the situation is that the noble simply regards the serf as not worth noticing, but this is a nonemotional response akin to dispassionately judging that someone has done something wrong. It’s not the relevant case. The pertinent example is where the noble actually feels contempt for the serf. I submit that in such a case the noble regards the serf as failing *as a serf*. That is, the noble regards the serf as failing to adequately venerate the noble so that the serf becomes noticeable, rather than not noticed. So the noble’s contempt addresses the serf as failing at the serf’s socially salient role, which is, again, the evaluative content I attribute to contempt.

9. *Why Withdrawal and Disengagement?*

So far, I’ve defended a novel interpretation of contempt’s evaluative presentation and also argued that it should rightfully be seen as an accountability response. In this section, I want to hypothesize about *why* contempt takes the specific response it does. Why would withdrawal or disengagement make *more* sense for a contemptuous person than approaching or confronting the target when the target is construed as failing in a social role? In other words, why not respond directly to the person failing, explicitly call them to account, and demand they act otherwise, instead of obliquely holding them accountable? Here are some tentative thoughts sparked by Kwame Anthony Appiah’s book, *The Honor Code* (Appiah 2010).

In the book, Appiah argues that several moral revolutions—the eradication of dueling in England, the end of footbinding in China, and the collapse of the Transatlantic slave trade—were driven more by concerns about honor than by the force of the arguments against these practices. In each case, Appiah argues that a significant part of the concern that

led to the elimination of these practices was growing feelings of contempt for those who participated in them and correlate feelings of shame by the practitioners. Dueling became unfashionable, in part, when commoners took up the practice, which was shameful to the gentlemen who engaged in it. Footbinding fell out of favor when it became seen as a way in which China was 'backward' compared to the developing industrialized world. The slave trade crumbled after workers in Britain came to see slave labor as devaluing the work they themselves did, since slave labor was unpaid.

In all these cases, reform occurred when people's social identities were under threat. I have argued that contempt presents someone as violating the terms of a normatively defined social role. If I'm right about contempt's evaluative presentation, we can see why withdrawal and exclusion are the characteristic motivations, rather than approach and confrontation. Contempt tries to protect our social identities from harm by others, just as resentment tries to protect our persons from harm. Our social identities get meaning at least in part because of the fact that others share in those identities and help shape them. Being a gentleman was defined by what you did and what you were allowed to do, so once the norms and practices shifted to allow commoners to duel, gentlemen were forced to give up dueling or become more like commoners. They chose the higher status option. So did Chinese people who opposed footbinding and free laborers who opposed the slave trade. Being a professor is a higher status position because professors typically have more education and thus have a greater understanding of the material than laity. Your contempt for your incompetent colleague serves to both hold her responsible and to separate yourself from her so that her ineptitude doesn't tarnish the presumed facility with the material and status that comes to you via your role.

For Appiah, honor involves norms or codes that define what a person of your identity should do and also allows you to share in the achievements of others whose identity you share (2010, 162). Our social identities and social achievements aren't fully up to us because they require the participation of other people. What others do can be a threat to me and others in my group even if they don't directly harm me or others I care about, because our social identities isn't solely under our control.

My father was a professor and editor; he suffered a massive stroke years ago and can no longer work at either vocation. Bridge is one of his stand-ins. I imagine my father's contempt for the novice bridge player stems, in part, from bridge having this role for him. Since he can't do academic work or editing in a way he takes to be serious, a person who doesn't take bridge seriously is a threat to an important part of his social identity. If he can't convince the tyro to improve her betting and take the game seriously, his best option is to exclude her. Exclusion limits the danger to his social identity. I don't have an account of exactly how our social identities are constructed such that our achievements and failures contribute to the honor and dishonor to those with whom we share identities. But that seems correct to me. My proposal is that taking that assumption on board helps us make better sense of contempt's characteristic motivational patterns.

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